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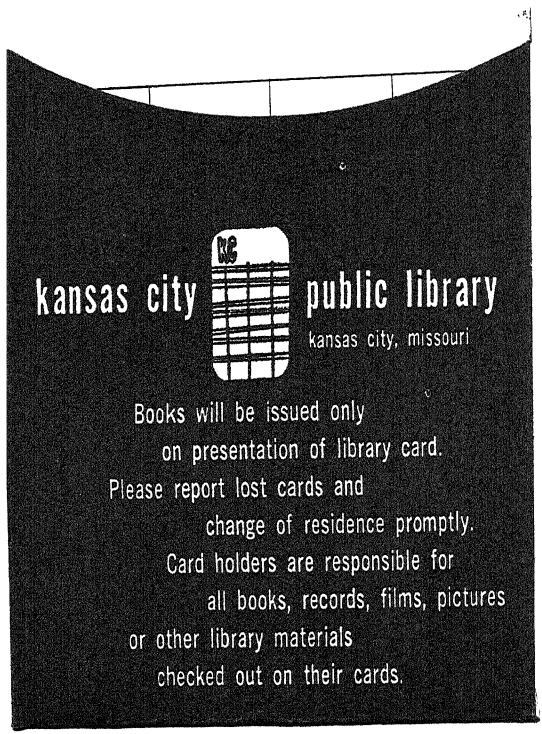

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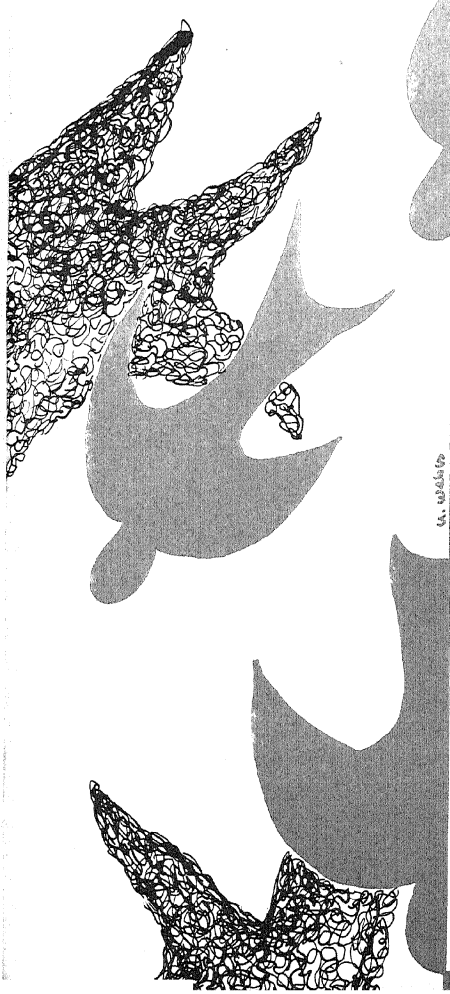

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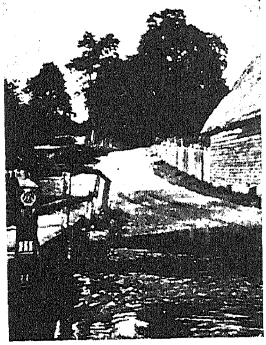

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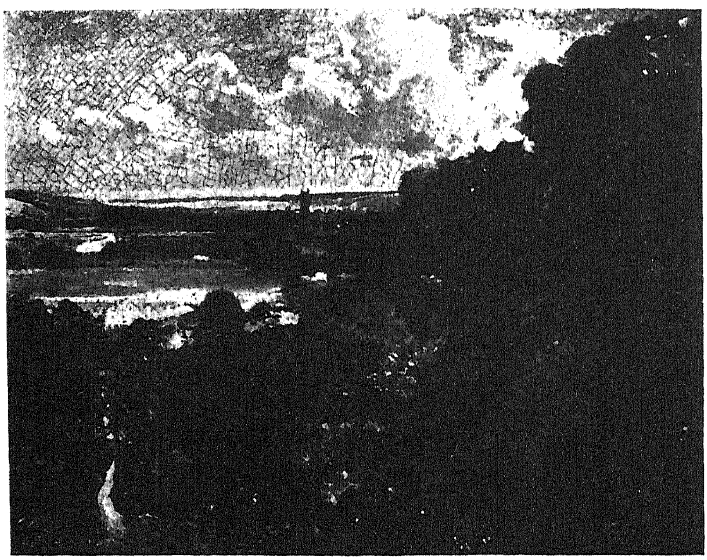

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1 Photograph of a Hertfordshire lane

2 John Constable : Dedham Vale

3 Christopher Wood : Church at Tréboul, 1930

4 Pablo Picasso : Head of a Man, 1911

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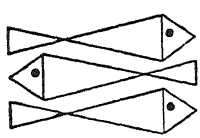
THE CHANGING FORMS OF ART

by

PATRICK HERON



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To

MY PARENTS

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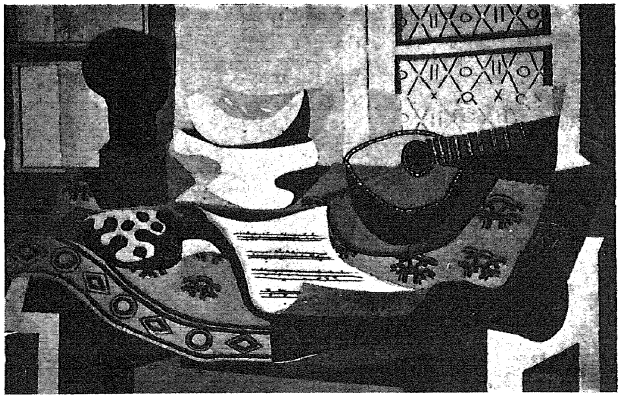

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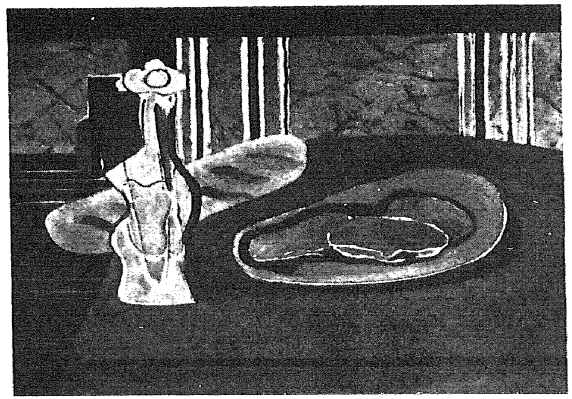

6

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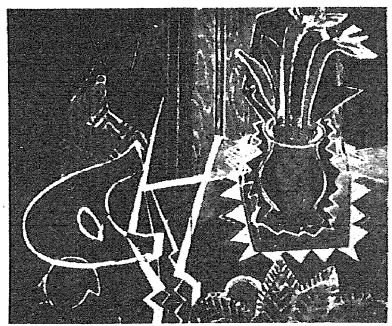
5 Pablo Picasso: Still Life with a Black Head, 1924

6 Georges Braque: Plate of Oysters, 1937

7 Georges Braque: The Duet, 1937

8 Georges Braque: Still Life with a Vase of Flowers



8

INTRODUCTION

To make this book I have drawn upon roughly half the material which I have published since I began to write about art in 1945. But the essays, articles and occasional broadcast scripts do not, for the most part, reappear in their original form: they have more often than not been trimmed, even melted down in some cases, and then welded together into larger units—nine separate pieces on Picasso, for instance, are here compounded into a single longer essay. I have not chosen this form of presentation because I wished to revise my expressed opinion on this or that painter or picture (such revision would be unending; and the present moment is no better than other moments as the one at which to *fix* my changing views). I have chosen it so that the reader may be spared the tedium of disentangling the past from the present on every page—that is, the tedium of having continuously to ignore references to the particular exhibition, or circumstance, which occasioned the original article.

Nevertheless, this book remains essentially a collection of articles—articles which registered a response, at a particular moment, to the particular stimulus which a new artist, or new works by a familiar artist, afforded me in my impermanent rôle as an art critic. Naturally, if I were to experience that stimulus to-day—but for the first time—my reaction would be different, in some way. For those who may be curious about the identity of the ingredients of each essay I have appended on page 281 a list giving the date and occasion of the original publication of each. I must say I hope this list will be consulted: I do not wish this book to be mistaken for an absolutely up-to-date announcement of my opinions and enthusiasms. Obviously, I have not

included anything which expresses ideas that I would now disown. But the emphasis is not always precisely where I would place it to-day, if I were to write again. For instance, the essay on Braque contains most of an article written in 1946, when I was experiencing the full grave splendour of this master for the first time. To recapture the same excitement would be impossible if I wrote again now: on the other hand, other things concerning Braque now await expression. I *mean* everything I say in this book: but not with my present self only. My past selves must have their say (who am I to censor them?). And thus there are inevitably certain contradictions, in the book taken as a whole.

In less than a score of instances, I think, I have suppressed a remark which seemed too far removed from what strikes me now as true. But my method in putting the book together has not involved re-writing; only a good deal of juggling with decapitated texts. I doubt if I have had to write five pages of new material; and most of that is cement for joining the component essays and article fragments together. A number of pieces have not been published before: but many of these were written some time ago, inspired not by the construction of this book but by a painter's death, or the eruption of some exhibition. The main exceptions are the essays on Wynter and Wells; and the latter parts of those on Hilton and Butler.

* * *

Contemporary art, which, with rare exceptions, is my subject at all times, is changing; and rapidly changing at that. My assessment of the varied movements, the dominant artists or the outstanding works themselves is also changing, and must continue to change. No period has experienced such a succession of landslides. This cultural uncertainty, with its chaos of values, is exhilarating to the painter, whose creative energy is more than ever stimulated by the challenge inherent in the situation. Art has never been more energetic or vital—yet directionless, seen all in all—than during the last forty years. To the critic, however, the maelstrom of ideas is more worrying. He is oppressed, for instance, by the quite unprecedented difficulty we all experience nowadays in being able to agree even about the meaning of simple critical terms. The creative disorder displayed in a hundred contemporary artists' works does not occasion any pain to the painters themselves: they may even enjoy it. But it does present the critic with an almost impossibly complex task, because it is precisely *order* that he

is striving to detect in art and to express in art criticism. I think Sir Herbert Read is alone in having squarely confronted the inchoate movements and counter-movements and striven to render them intelligible in terms of a unified, comprehensive and lucid philosophy of art. Yet it *is* a philosophy that Sir Herbert erects: and, as such, what he has written has frequently the remoteness from the sensuous facts of painting that one would expect any philosophy to have. He is art philosopher, perhaps, rather than art critic. But we are all in his debt: he has changed the English scene.

I have not the powers or qualifications of Sir Herbert for dealing with the subject on this level. I shun *interpreting* art. I know that the limitations of my criticism are the limitations of the mere articulate painter. The extremes of my ambition, as a critic, barely extend beyond a desire to assist the reader to become *more conscious* of the palpable plastic realities of a painting or sculpture. If I am more interested in the changing forms of art than in its changing content, this may be due to the fact that I am a painter: but it may also be due to the situation in general, as I diagnose it—which is that, our art being increasingly abstract, the formal approach in criticism is alone capable of meeting the intellectual requirements of the spectator. In most of the best modern art the form is increasingly the content of a work. It is upon the changing *forms* of painting or sculpture that we have to meditate if we are to become aware of the meaning of the work as a whole. Form *is* content now. So, analysis of form (and I mean colour, design, construction, spatial organization and so on by the one word *form* in this context) has become the chief critical function of the day. Yet the resistance—in England—to this kind of writing is widespread and determined—as I know to my cost. My adherence to it lost me my platform as a regular critic. According to the literary criteria by which I have been judged from time to time my criticism has been called 'too technical'; 'difficult for the general reader'; 'obsessed with the *means* of painting'; and so on. I have also been told that my approach dates back to the 'twenties (meaning, as I should like to think, Fry's splendid insistence upon the visual fact, the plastic reality of colour and form?). Personally I believe that formal criticism is an art still in its infancy. Painting of whatever school is not understood except through an extension of one's awareness of the visual: abstract painting, which dominates the world to-day, is quite meaningless if we refuse to find that meaning in mere colour and form. In such awareness of colour and form we at least have a concrete experience: but in discussion of

the iconography, symbolism or 'meaning' of a modern picture we have only the tenuous satisfaction of a speculation—we have, to be specific, a discussion of that sort of meaning which painting *shares* with literature; of that element in painting which is not unique to painting.

* * *

This literary content in painting is not to be ignored, however. It plays its part, which is, pictorially, a subterranean one. But there are many English critics who do not see this: to them the subject, the mood, atmosphere or poetry (these are favourite words) of a painting are all far more important than the painting itself. They make a passing bow in the direction of the pictorial realities—colour nice; design strong; drawing weak—and then get back to the subject and its mood (of horror, charm or delight). And of course the subject of a representational painting is easier for some people to write or read about than the painting itself. I seriously suggest that this is one reason why we have heard so much lately about 'a return to realism' and 'social realism'. If there were any such return in evidence in the works of our most gifted and serious painters, how much easier art criticism would become! One would be excused from writing about painting; and one could bring one's powers of persuasive eloquence into play in a pleasant discursion on the quality of the disquiet that pervades the London squares at twilight; or the social implications of bathing babies in Camden Town attics. But the plain fact is that this new 'movement' has been created by the critics, who have hailed the work of students to support their theory. But students have, and ought to have, a preoccupation with natural appearances: all art students are always realists in this sense; there is nothing new in such a situation. Actually, the young English painters recently welcomed in this way are not *realists* at all but *expressionists*: and some show considerable talent. But it is typical of the insular and idiosyncratic English art critic that he should mistake a very late Anglo-Saxon flirtation with expressionism for a new movement—a revival of realism! What, in any case, does *realism* mean? There is nothing more real about realism than about cubism: there is no form of realism which does not rely upon formal invention, or upon the manipulation of a formal convention, to the same extent that cubism does. In the end, all art is artificial; a construction which we read by imposing it upon nature (if it is in a figurative idiom). The question is, which aesthetic artifice do we want to-day? Which pictorial or sculptural device can to-day be made the vehicle of energy,

vitality, and the sense of the artist's excitement about life? What bestows the sense of reality on a painting is not its 'likeness' to this or that extraneous object (whether a landscape, a dead fish or a firing-squad at work). It is its inherent vitality, its power of *direct* communication of energy, thought and emotion. And when I say that that communication is direct, I mean that it spurts straight from the forms and colours and design, and does not come at us by way of 'the meaning' of the image these make on the canvas. Thus, even highly representational painting is good or bad according to the force and logic and eloquence of its abstract components—and not by virtue of its representational element. The representation of visual reality is not, and never has been, a creative act. It is a mechanical one; and now that we have brought the camera to a state of near perfection we may safely leave the job to this machine. That great painting of the past which many mistake for an exact rendering of natural appearances was really a highly developed process of abstraction: certain elements of verisimilitude were abstracted from the visual data, weighed, measured and then *constructed* into an artefact. This abstraction, when *read* by the spectator, came to appear, through increasing familiarity, as the automatic registration of the visual scene, although it was nothing of the sort. Hard constructivist thought, a complex juggling with the abstract components of form and colour—this is the mode of work productive of a Rembrandt or a Vermeer, for instance.

* * *

I referred earlier on to the presence of contradictions in this book. Chief of these, as the reader will discover, is an indecision (or, rather, varying estimates) about the merits of total abstraction; or, as I prefer to call it, of non-figurative art. I am completely certain now of one thing only, in relation to non-figurative painting and sculpture: and that is that what at first appears non-figurative (i.e. devoid of reference to objects external to the work itself) does in the course of time begin to *take on* a figurative function. It is as though non-figuration were an ideal impossible of achievement: it is as though all forms become, willy-nilly, invested by the spectator with the property of symbols, or signs, or images which overlap with those of reality. We eventually insist on seeing landscape in Ben Nicholson's rectilinear arrangements; or faces and foliage in the eloquent mottled splutters of Jackson Pollock. Are not these the 'realism' of the present, then?

I do not apologize for the theoretical disunity of this book. It does

not pretend to be a perfect and logical structure; it is the diary of a nine-year journey through the changing landscape of modern art. One aims, at each stage, at the truth and one hopes that one's judgements may have some fairly durable validity or relevance, of course. But I do not see how one can possibly expect to achieve anything like an entirely unified system of judgement at a time like the present. The most vital artists of our day are not moving in a solid phalanx from one easily recognizable destination to the next: they are a host of individuals scurrying, like ants, in all directions at once. In order to say anything of the least value about the work of any one of these contemporaries it is an indispensable prerequisite that one put oneself in as close a sympathy with his aims as is humanly possible. And, contrary to widespread belief, I am convinced that a very considerable measure of interpretative sympathy is always possible—even for another painter. In fact, I have frequently discovered that, *as critic*, my keenest interest, my strongest enthusiasm and my warmest desire to interpret are aroused precisely by a style of painting to which, *as painter*, I am—but perhaps only temporarily—hostile. For instance, at a moment when, in my own painting, I had found myself renouncing a more abstract for a more figurative mode—at this exact moment I discovered in myself an impulsion to describe, elucidate and champion the works of the most uncompromisingly non-figurative painters to be found on the scene. The psychology of this apparent contradiction in my attitude may well be obscured to myself. Some might explain it in terms of automatic compensation, i.e. that having 'failed' to create a non-figurative art of my own I wished to demonstrate that I was nonetheless in possession of its secrets; and so chose to act as an initiate-interpreter of the non-figurative mystery as it appeared in the work of my friends. That is a possible explanation. But there are a number of others, too. To take one: I might say that, having found myself compelled, in my own painting, to refrain from jettisoning the figurative function entirely (through a sense that this means an arbitrary *loss*, since, to me, the element of figuration may exist *in addition* to an abstract pictorial structure), I was then impelled to defend work which was a record of just such a noble sacrifice. In other words that, having decided, *as painter*, that total abstraction was an impoverishment, I felt it my duty, *as critic*, to see that everything that could be said in favour of it was said: to see to it that no one should be allowed to go in ignorance of the profound arguments which existed in its favour.

But I think my real answer to the charge that in my double rôle as painter-critic I am double-faced (or multi-faced) would be a much simpler one. It is that, for me, the assumption that one man's creative and critical potentialities should match up precisely is thoroughly superficial. When someone else does well something which I, because I am myself, do not wish to do, or am not able to do, why should this preclude my objective enjoyment of his performance? Where critical appraisal is concerned we should all (for all of us are critics whether we like it or not) be double-faced. The extension of one's sensibility is not a process that should suffer any arbitrary delimitation whatsoever.

* * *

I am not saying, though, that open-mindedness should be unending. There is a 'scientific' school of thought (or perhaps I should say, a tendency) in contemporary art criticism for whom condemnation or praise are both meaningless: the attitude is that all works of art present us with 'phenomena', and that these phenomena may be described, listed, categorized and their causation, psychological and physical, hazarded: they will, it is held, inevitably be interesting simply because they exist, just as fungi, curiously shaped pebbles, philodendrons, the Milky Way or the bacteria patterns on a pathologist's slide exist. I am opposed to this critical tendency for two reasons. It represents, in my view, an attempt to by-pass the fundamental result of any response to art, which is, baldly, to pronounce a moral judgement. One is trying to decide how good or how bad the work is. Secondly, it so magnifies the very necessary discipline of 'being open to', of 'putting oneself in sympathy with . . .' that it renders it meaningless. If one has renounced altogether the right to condemn, disapprove or in any way find fault with works of art, then one's acceptance of whatever is offered must be automatic. The art-work thus becomes a mere object, the neutral manifestation of certain causal laws at work in the matter of which it consists. And the maddening subtlety of this modern heresy lies in the fact that the novel forms evolved by the finest creative spirits of our age do often at first have the appearance of being more or less identical with one or other natural manifestation. The relation between Moore's early works and river-hollowed stones: the nearness of Picasso's huge, nervous lines of drawing to the scraped line a careless lorry engraves along a warehouse wall: the likeness of a Pollock surface of dripped and spattered pigment to the floor of that warehouse, or to the lichened

face of a rock—these all need a *little* time to disentangle. But once we can see that the art-work is distinct from the object produced fortuitously, or by natural forces, then we can only admire it the more for its controlled and conscious conquest of the natural. It is just because the Pollock is *not* so much haphazard dripping that its power exists for drawing our attention to the fascinating qualities of a spilt liquid. Art makes conscious that which has always existed; but existed without the conscious eye of aesthetic appraisal being turned upon it. All truth is exhilarating—even the revelation that paint flung or dripped or spattered inevitably, exquisitely and precisely records laws of movement. Pollock, of course, invests his canvases with more mystery than might be explained by what I have just written. Indeed, as with all good art, the whole truth is unstatable. Braque's famous dictum to the effect that 'the only thing of value in art is that which cannot be explained' should remain forever in mind. To the good critic it provides, at the same instant, both the starting-point and the inescapable destination of his entire endeavour.

Holland Park, London,
October 1954.

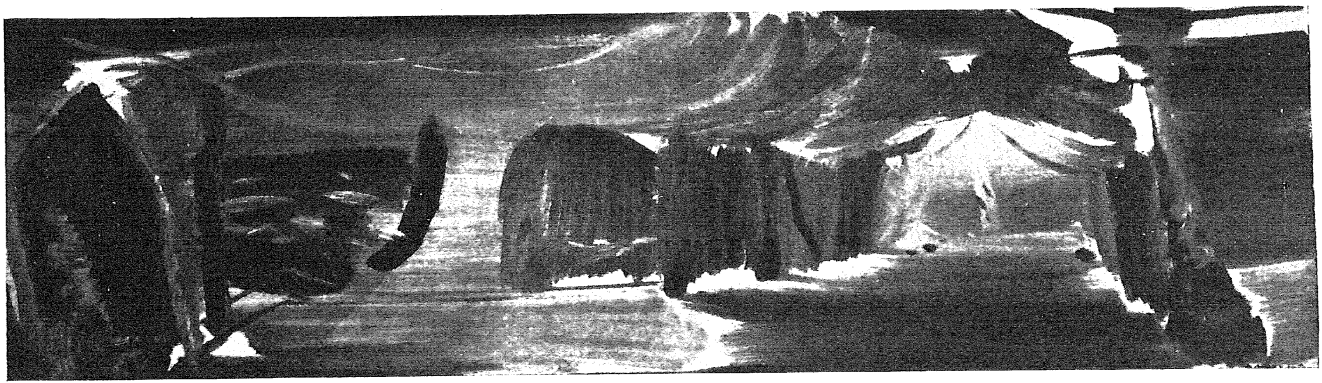
PATRICK HERON

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first thanks are due to Sir Herbert Read, not only for the encouragement which he has so often given me, but because he first proposed that this book be undertaken, and suggested the form it might follow. I am very grateful to members of my family (especially, perhaps, to my aunt, Miss Leila Davies), and to many of my friends for stimulating me with advice and criticism. Also, at the outset, I was kindly assisted in sorting out my material by Mr. John Curtis.

I am anxious to make acknowledgement to all editors and publishers under whose aegis the ingredients of this book made their first appearance in print. In particular I am grateful to Mr. Philip Mairet who, as Editor of the late *New English Weekly*, first prompted me to write about art; and then published my early attempts. Again, my special thanks are due to the Editor of the *New Statesman and Nation*, in whose pages perhaps one half of the contents of this book were first published. I wish to thank Mr. Trevor Dannatt (Editor) and Elek Books Ltd. for permission to use two essays published in *The Architects' Year Book III* and *V*, and Ernest Benn Ltd. for permission to reprint the essay on Vlaminck. My thanks are due also to the Trustees, Arts Department, Dartington Hall, for permission to reprint parts of the essay on pottery, and to the B.B.C.; to the Editor of *House and Garden* and Condé Nast Publications Ltd.; to *Art News and Review*; *The Listener*; Hulton Press and to Mr. A. S. B. Glover for a number of helpful suggestions. I have very kindly been lent blocks by The Arts Council and Percy Lund Humphries Ltd. Finally, I must express my thanks to the artists whose work I have reproduced and to the photographers whose photographs I have used, and to those who have helped me to procure these—in particular to M. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler. Where no acknowledgement accompanies a reproduction, I have been unable to trace the photographer.

P. H.



9 Ivon Hitchens: Winter Walk No. 3, 1948

CONTENTS

		PAGE
	INTRODUCTION	vii
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xv
	Part One	
1	THE NECESSITY OF DISTORTION IN PAINTING	3
2	HILLS AND FACES: *Hitchens, Lanyon*	21
3	SPACE IN CONTEMPORARY PAINTING AND ARCHITECTURE	40
4	SUBMERGED RHYTHM: *A Potter's Aesthetic*	52
5	CUBISM, CONSTRUCTIVISM AND THE ARCHITECT	66
	Part Two	
6	BRAQUE	81
7	PICASSO	96
8	PIERRE BONNARD AND ABSTRACTION	116
9	MAURICE DE VLAMINCK	130
10	FOUR NOTES: *Klee, Matisse, Soutine, Léger*	141
	Part Three	
11	MODERN ENGLISH ROMANTICS: *Sutherland, Vaughan, Wynter*	155
12	PAUL NASH	175
13	FIVE TYPES OF ABSTRACTION: *Nicholson, Pasmore, Scott, Hilton, Wells*	183
14	SCULPTURE: FRUIT OR THORN? *Moore, Hepworth, Calder, Butler, Matisse*	208

Part Four

		PAGE
15	TWENTY-FIVE FRAGMENTS	237
	Cézanne's Watercolours	237
	Rome, April 1953	238
	Rouault's 'Guerre' and 'Miserère' Aquatints	239
	Artists in Cornwall	241
	To an American Painter	242
	Frances Hodgkins	244
	Alan Davie	246
	James Cant in London	247
	Massimo Campigli	248
	A Paradox of Criticism	249
	Apropos of Sickert, Keene and Cézanne	249
	Matthew Smith—English Fauve	253
	The Living Dead	257
	Tintoretto and Braque	259
	Realism in Titian	260
	Leonardo—Scientist	262
	Abstraction in Rembrandt	262
	Luminosity and Voluminosity in Drawings	263
	Paris	264
	The Power of Paris	265
	Three Schools in Post-war Paris	266
	The Philosophy of Herbert Read	268
	Mexico	271
	Turner Resurgent	275
	Space in French Landscape	276
	NOTES	281
	INDEX	285

ILLUSTRATIONS

(End of Book)

The plates listed below are not intended to be regarded as an anthology of reproductions. They have been included simply as illustrations for certain passages in the text. Ideally, essays about painting would only be read in the presence of the works discussed: in their absence, the critic of a visual art has both to evoke, by verbal description, and then to analyse, a picture or sculpture. Photographs are always inadequate; but they do go some way towards acquainting the reader with—or reminding him of—the visual facts upon which the critic comments. P.H.

I. THE NECESSITY OF DISTORTION

1 Photograph of a Hertfordshire lane.

2 JOHN CONSTABLE: Dedham Vale.
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees, the National Gallery, London.)

3 CHRISTOPHER WOOD: Church at Tréboul, 1930.
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Redfern Gallery and the Trustees of the Tate Gallery, London.)

4 PABLO PICASSO: Head of a Man, 1911.
(Private Collection, London.)

5 PABLO PICASSO: Still Life with a Black Head, 1924.
(Private Collection, New York.)

6 GEORGES BRAQUE: Plate of Oysters, 1937.
(By courtesy of Paul Rosenberg & Co., New York.)

7 GEORGES BRAQUE: The Duet, 1937.
(Coll. Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris.)

8 GEORGES BRAQUE: Still Life with a Vase of Flowers.

II. HILLS AND FACES

9 IVON HITCHENS: Winter Walk No. 3, 1948.
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Artist.)

10 PETER LANYON: Porthleven, 1951.
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Artist. Coll: Tate Gallery, London.)

15 IVON HITCHENS: Autumn Ride No. 2, 1951.
(Coll: Howard Bliss Esq., London. Reproduced by Courtesy of the Artist.)

III. SPACE IN CONTEMPORARY PAINTING AND ARCHITECTURE

12 PIERRE SOULAGES: Painting, May, 1953.
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Artist.)

13 NICOLAS DE STAËL: Painting.
(Reproduced by courtesy of Gimpel Fils, London.)

14 MIES VAN DER ROHE: Interior, German Pavilion, Barcelona Exhibition, 1929.

IV. SUBMERGED RHYTHM: A POTTER'S AESTHETIC

16 BERNARD LEACH: Stoneware Vase with abstract sgraffito pattern, 1952.
(Coll: the Author. Photo: Roger Mayne.)

V. CUBISM, CONSTRUCTIVISM AND THE ARCHITECT

11 JUAN GRIS: Guitar and Bottle, 1917.
(Reproduced by courtesy of Percy Lund Humphries Ltd.)

VI. BRAQUE

17 In Braque's Studio in Paris; *c.* 1949.
(Photograph by Felix H. Man.)

18 GEORGES BRAQUE: The Studio, 5; 1950.
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Artist. Photo: Galerie Maeght, Paris.)

19 GEORGES BRAQUE: Interior, 1942.
(*Reproduced by courtesy of the Artist. Block lent by Percy Lund Humphries Ltd.*)

20 GEORGES BRAQUE: The Billiard Table, 1949-52.
(*Reproduced by courtesy of the Artist. Photo: Galerie Maeght, Paris.*)

21 Georges Braque at work in his Studio at Varengeville, 1949.
(*Photograph by Felix H. Man.*)

VII. PICASSO

22 PABLO PICASSO: Still Life with Candle, April 4; 1944.
(*Reproduced by courtesy of Galerie Louise Leiris, Paris.*)

23 PABLO PICASSO: Peace, 1952. (*One of a pair of mural paintings, each measuring approximately 15 feet high and 33 feet long, at Vallauris.*)
(*Photograph by courtesy of Éditions Cercle d'Art, Paris.*)

24 PABLO PICASSO: War, 1952. (*The mural painting which is the complement of 'Peace,' plate 23.*)
(*Photograph by courtesy of Éditions Cercle d'Art, Paris.*)

26 PABLO PICASSO: Les Demoiselles des Bords de la Seine, 1950.
(*Reproduced by courtesy of Galerie Louise Leiris, Paris.*)

VIII. PIERRE BONNARD AND ABSTRACTION

25 PIERRE BONNARD: The Bowl of Milk.
(*Private Collection, London. Photograph by Roger Mayne.*)

IX. MAURICE DE VLAMINCK

40 MAURICE DE VLAMINCK: La Gare d'Auvers-sur-Oise, 1920.

41 MAURICE DE VLAMINCK: La Route de l'Aigle, 1944.

X. FOUR NOTES

29 HENRI MATISSE: Large Interior in Red, 1948.
(Coll: Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris. Photograph by courtesy of the Royal Academy, London.)

38 FERNAND LÉGER: The Forest, 1942.
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Artist.)

XI. MODERN ENGLISH ROMANTICS

32 KEITH VAUGHAN: Finisterre: Seaweed Hoist, 1951.
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Artist. Photo: A. C. Cooper Ltd.)

33 BRYAN WYNTER: Estuary Landscape: 1947.
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Artist. Photo: Studio St. Ives Ltd.)

XII. FIVE TYPES OF ABSTRACTION

31 BEN NICHOLSON: Feb. 12-52 (Carafe).
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Artist. Coll: Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis. Photo: Studio St. Ives Ltd.)

28 VICTOR PASMORE: Spiral Motif in Black and White—The Snowstorm, 1950.
(Coll: The Arts Council of Gt. Britain. Reproduced by courtesy of the Artist.)

36 WILLIAM SCOTT: Table Still Life, 1951-52.
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Artist.)

30 ROGER HILTON: Painting, 1954.
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Artist and Gimpel Fils, London. Photo: Roger Mayne.)

27 JOHN WELLS: City Dawn, 1947.
(Coll: Gothenburg Art Museum, Sweden. Reproduced by courtesy of the Artist.)

XIII. PAUL NASH

XIV. SCULPTURE—FRUIT OR THORN?

37 HENRY MOORE: Reclining Figure (Internal and External Forms), 1953. *(Plaster: 7 ft. long.)*
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Artist.)

34 BARBARA HEPWORTH: Monolith (empyrean), 1953. (*Blue Corrib limestone: height, 8 ft. 9 in.*)
(*Reproduced by courtesy of the Artist.*)

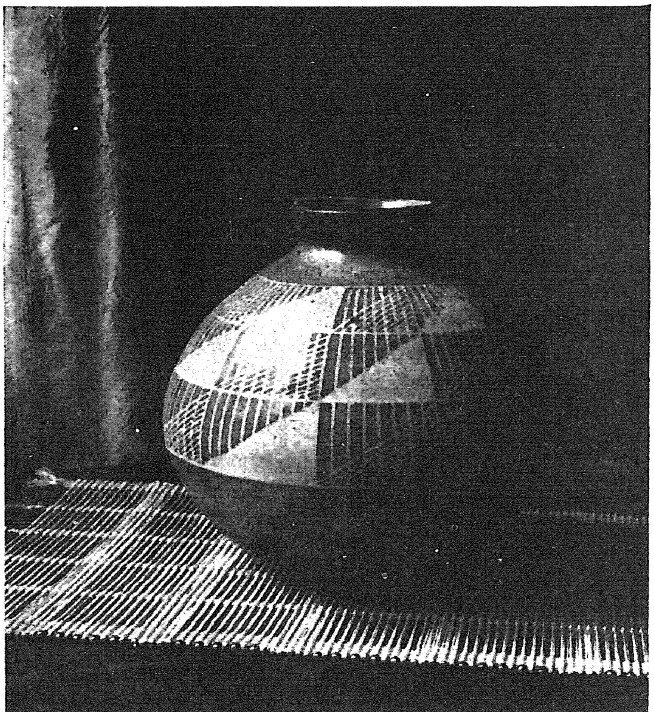
35 REG BUTLER: Woman, 1949. (*Forged iron: height 12 in.: study for large figure.*)
(*Coll: Marcus Whiffen, Esq. Reproduced by courtesy of the Artist.*)

XV. TWENTY-FIVE FRAGMENTS

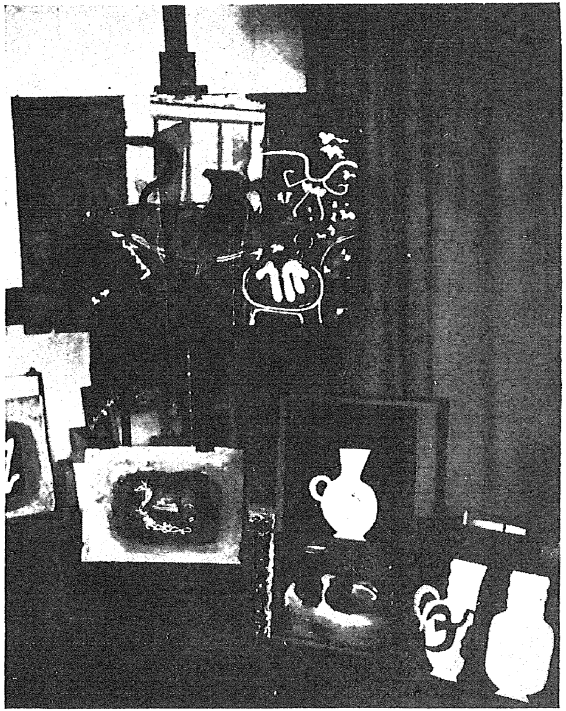
39 ALAN DAVIE: Painting, May, 1953.
(*Reproduced by courtesy of the Artist.*)

10 Peter Lanyon: Porthleven, 1951

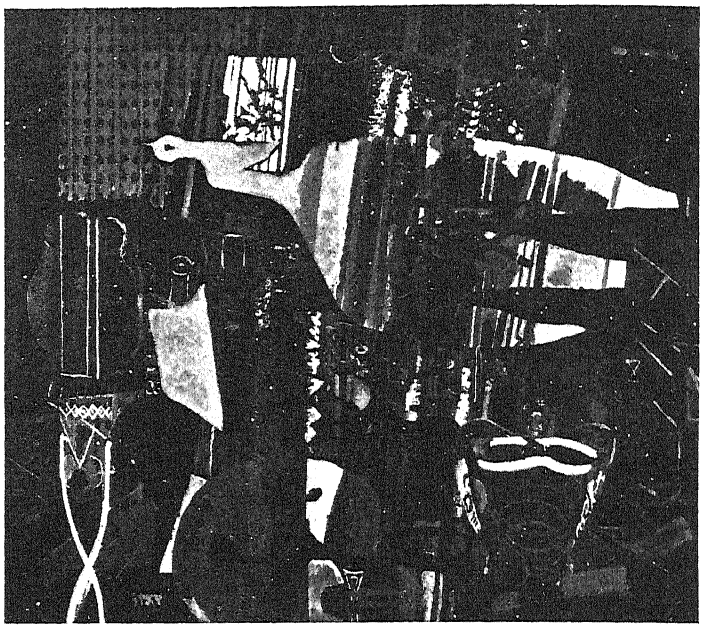
THE CHANGING FORMS OF ART



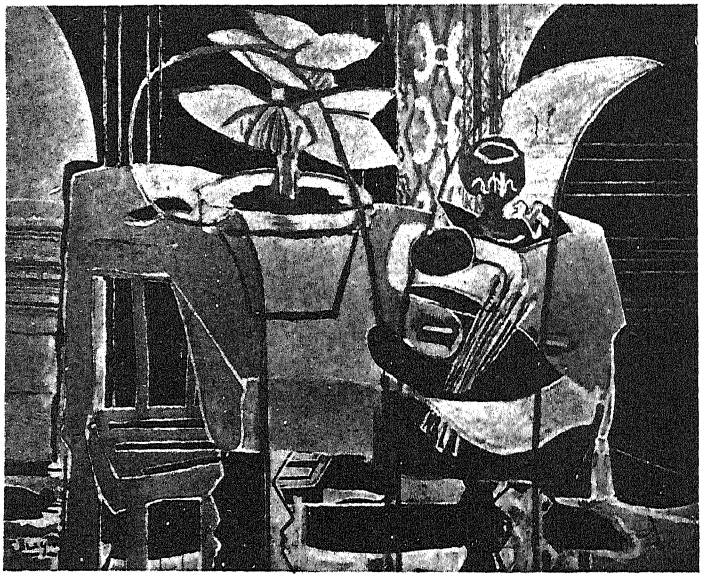
16 Bernard Leach: Stoneware Vase with abstract sgraffito pattern, 1952



17 In Braque's Studio in Paris; *c.* 1949



18 Georges Braque: The Studio, 5; 1950



19 Georges Braque: Interior, 1942

THE NECESSITY OF DISTORTION IN PAINTING

I THINK perhaps we may divide the critics of modern art into two categories. First, there are the self-styled defenders of tradition, the consciously conservative whose rigid sensibility precludes their awareness of new qualities in art. These cannot make the exciting jump out of an old into a new state of feeling and perception. They spend their time asserting the value of 'values' which we have all long since absorbed into our very bones. And when it comes to that most difficult of all critical tasks, when it comes to distinguishing the spuriously 'modern' from the contemporary which is vital, the safely traditional critic is completely at sea. Because he has evaded the tension necessary for an expansion of sensibility he finds when it comes to an encounter with new modes of thought and expression—he finds that he does not possess the means for grappling with it. An ability to suffer a certain dislocation emotionally and intellectually is necessary when we are confronted by contemporary creativeness. We cannot measure the vitally new with any yardstick in our possession until we have made what can only be called a living response to it; until we have welcomed it into ourselves, as it were, and allowed it fully to do its work of disorganizing—perhaps only slightly—the structure of values which each of us has set up. Now the consciously conservative type of critic tends to use the word *distortion* quite indiscriminately in connection with all modern works of art, whether good or bad, valid or spurious. Furthermore, he imagines that in so doing he is defending a tradition in which

distortion has no place: he imagines he is upholding what he takes to be the norm in the matter of visual plastic expression. He is perturbed if it is pointed out that those features of pictorial or sculptural expression which, in contemporary work, are commonly denoted by the term *distortion*, are all present in differing degree in the old masters themselves. *Distortion* is therefore synonymous, for the conservative critic, with 'the unfamiliar'; or, rather, the as yet unabsorbed, unassimilated. And I am sure that our so called 'understanding' of works of art is primarily and overwhelmingly a question of what we have absorbed and not of what we have had explained. We tend to overlook the fact that popular appreciation of, say, Constable, or to-day of Van Gogh, is not the result of a lot of explanatory and intellectually ingenious lectures and articles and books. Constable and, more recently, Van Gogh and Cézanne now administer to the spiritual needs of large sections of the public. But this is *not* because the difficulties which their works once posed for their intelligent contemporaries have ever been elucidated and, *as* difficulties, demolished. It is simply because we have now arrived at a point in time when unpractised and inexpert spectators no longer erect intellectual obstacles, in the case of these artists, to their own enjoyment. Preconceived ideas of how Van Gogh *should* have painted no longer obtrude; thousands now enter freely into Van Gogh's experience—and they do this without ever having had Van Gogh translated into the 'rational' terms which they seem to demand in the case of Picasso. They do this because Van Gogh and other painters of his generation and the next have by now wrought a change in the general sensibility—just as the Cubists, twenty years later, were also to alter the whole mode of vision of Western man, so that to-day there is no aspect of industrial or architectural or advertisement design which has not registered our desire for rectilinear rhythms.

The second type of critic whose use of the word *distortion* is equally undiscriminating is the critic for whom anything new, anything unfamiliar, however freakish, however lacking in sound antecedents, is good and therefore welcome. For this critic newness itself is the dominant criterion. We are now at the point where the dead academicism of the past is in the process of being displaced by the equally dead academicism of the future. I think we are now at the point where an unthinking majority which automatically supported the automatic productions of Royal Academicians is about to give way to a new but equally academic majority which will with an equally automatic response praise any *innovation*, whether it be in the subject or the treat-

ment of the work; whether in the idea, or in the means by which that idea is expressed and given body. Just as in Paris at the present moment one hundred and fifty painters are making their names by playing variations on the numerous themes of Picasso, Klee, Mondrian or Matisse until we have a hard job to distinguish one young painter from the next—so in art criticism we must not be unduly dismayed to find an increasing number of critics who will automatically welcome and uphold anything so long as it derives from the right sources—that is, from Picasso or certain of his great contemporaries. (In England substitute Sickert, 'the Euston Road' and Sutherland.) In saying this I am not of course denying the greatness of Picasso, for whom I have always had the most passionate admiration: I am merely pointing out that the unthinking, insensitive academic attitude is about to manifest itself in a different guise; the indifferent or the plainly bad artist is now found sailing under a different ensign.

Once again, therefore, one must repeat the obvious yet elusive truth that in art, as in almost everything else, *no* classification holds good for long: almost as soon as it is consciously recognized—and therefore embalmed in words—the truly vital gives birth to the commonplace; and the new commonplace itself serves to obscure the next issue of the truly vital. At the present moment the true successors of Picasso, Braque and Matisse are doubtless largely obscured by the more obvious followers of these very painters. If we agree that the critic's first duty is to acknowledge true vitality, wherever he finds it, then we must be prepared to see the theories and rulings which seem to spring so spontaneously to the lips of all critics—we must expect to see these theories in a state of permanent disarray. For Nature has balanced the critical impulse against the creative impulse. Nature counters the critic's impulses to be tidy, to generalize and categorize by providing artists with an abundant diversity of creative forms: every artist born arrives on the scene with a new and a different combination of all the recognized ingredients of art. No sooner was Cubism given a name than dozens of 'Cubists' appeared who ought, strictly speaking, to have been disowned as such. No sooner has a semi-conscious impulse, mysteriously present simultaneously in the works of a number of different artists, not necessarily known to one another—no sooner has such a semi-conscious ingredient been spotted and brought into the full light of conscious recognition than it is instantly killed as a source and inspiration for further creative essays. This is because far the most vital of the many functions of painting, in our age at any rate, is its

exploratory function. The modern artist is scaling an invisible wall: he is running down a path which he cannot be sure exists. With his head down he is charging a perpetually recurring screen or barrier (the barrier of reason) which may at any moment prove dense enough to concuss him! In short—the quality of vitality in art is something very closely connected with risk, with pure daring. The artist who never feels, as he starts a new picture, that this time he is tempting madness to envelop him—such an artist is no artist at all. In so far as the territory now left for artistic discovery is, broadly speaking, an interior, subjective one (even new forms of 'realism' will be uncommonly subjective ones), it will be seen that the proper exploit of the modern painter is to push back the frontiers of the mind; to conquer psychic territories; to enlarge consciousness itself. In the past the vital artistic explorers have always had a purely external field of action in which their imaginations could find a basis for their own creative function. For instance, appearances long remained imperfectly analysed and for centuries after Leonardo da Vinci the workings of the physical world were still the natural focus of artistic as well as scientific interest and enquiry. Thus the spirit of science, the fascination with the external, physical setting of life permeated the products of the imagination. It was the French Impressionists who arrived at the summit of the naturalistic conquest of appearances and who were, therefore, at the great turning-point from an objective to a subjective basis for art.

It was the Impressionists who finally extended our awareness to the optical sensation itself; they were aware of the actual look of things for the first time. And we must not forget that 'the look' of a nude or a tree is itself elusive and illusory. The pink lump, the greenish mass—in these may reside the true appearance of these things to our eyes. But the *appearance* of any object may conceal more than it reveals of that object's true nature, of its structural reality. Of all the schools of European painting it is French Impressionism that is most nearly paralleled by the only completely objective recording of appearance that we have—namely, photography. Yet even the Impressionists had their purely lyrical, purely poetic aspect: even they, that is to say, to some extent were *imposing* a subjective version of exterior reality upon their subjects.

But what do I mean by subjective? If I could find a satisfactory definition of this word as it applies to painting—I should be more than half-way to explaining the need for distortion in pictorial art. Clearly, if the choice of words in the title of this essay is justifiable, I must show

that, so far from being eccentric, naïve or exceptional in any way as a mode of graphic or plastic expression, distortion is in fact the only proper and natural mode for a creative artist. To this it may be objected that, if the creative procedures of expression which I choose to label by the term *distortion* (and more exactly what these are I hope to describe later on)—if these procedures are in fact the only natural procedures—then the very word *distortion* is misleading, since it implies, in the words of *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, a form that is 'twisted out of the natural shape'.

But the *Oxford Dictionary* also defines *distortion* as 'any change of shape not involving breach of continuity'. Bending this phrase to our present subject, we might say that the lay spectator of painting does not normally use the term *distortion* until he senses just such a 'breach of continuity' in the forms represented before him. But, as I have already said, it seems to me that such a complaint often derives more from the spectator's lack of familiarity with the *kind* of distortion contained in the work before him than from any inherent 'breach of continuity'. Painting with which one is familiar is not infrequently painting of whose distortions one has ceased to be aware. It seems to me there is even a case for insisting that *any* representation of a three-dimensional subject upon the two-dimensional plane of a flat canvas involves distortion of one kind or another. Even with the photograph, which provides us with a touchstone in the question of the nature of appearances, we still have to learn to 'read' the two-dimensional markings. We have to be able to read the reference to a three-dimensional subject which the flat photograph contains. And we must realize that in looking at the most photographic of paintings we are certainly not arriving at our sensation of its subject as naturally or as directly as if we were looking at that subject in reality. Realistic or photographic painting follows certain rules; in itself it constitutes a definite art form; it is just as much a *convention* for grappling with the infinite subtlety of natural appearances as any other pictorial convention—Cubism for instance. Cubism, with all its supposedly unnatural sharp-edged, floating planes—planes which have expanded in the artist's consciousness until they have all but extinguished or obliterated the solid object, as a facet of whose form they originated: planes which began merely as a part of the plastic means of definition by which the illusion of a solid form was created, but which ended up as self-contained units of design, so curiously animated that they seem to have been invested with the affective power of symbols—Cubism, I was

about to say, derives its character just as directly from clues contained in visual sensation as does any other supposedly more naturalistic mode. The naturalistic painter, directing his gaze into the amorphous, vibrating, rainbow-coloured masses of the natural scene, waits until his mind, sorting out the wild chaotic rush of visual sense data, has found a rough blueprint of the particular scene confronting him among the vast collection of remembered pictures which, like any other painter, he stores in a sort of cerebral reference library. When from this private collection he has extracted a 'naturalistic' tree that roughly corresponds with the palpitating mass of multi-coloured dots that he in fact is seeing before him, the naturalistic painter begins the process which the unwary might have called 'copying the scene in front of him', but which I will describe as the process of taking an interior, subjective image from his cerebral library and imposing it upon the external image which his eye transmits to him. In doing this he makes, of course, a number of adjustments as he goes along, so that the final image on his canvas shows certain modifications of the 'naturalistic' image he first had in mind—modifications suggested during momentary lapses in the process of imposition, when the real tree actually had the chance to intervene a little.

Perhaps the point I am trying to make at this moment may be summed up in more abstract terms. I do not believe unreservedly in the usefulness of the criterion implied in the phrases 'truth to Nature'; 'truth to appearances'; 'what the eye sees'—and so on. For one thing, we do not know what our eyes see: they see differently from minute to minute. The same objects in the same arrangement in the same light can change their appearance while we are looking at them according to what we are thinking about them as we look at them. Looking at a large cooking-apple and thinking of curves we *see* the apple entirely composed of separate but interlocking curved surfaces—planes, we call them. The apple presents itself as a sort of symphony in curves, a counterpoint of intersecting arcs. But think suddenly of straight lines, flat surfaces and small rectilinear or triangular planes: think hard enough to banish the curves; and suddenly the apple changes under your very nose into a mass, vaguely spherical, but built up entirely of sharp straight planes or facets. The apple in front of you is transformed by your thought; you yourself determine what it will look like by deciding, perhaps unconsciously, just what you are going to look for in it. This is the unconscious process of seeing: we see what we are qualified to see; which is, largely, whatever we are capable of *injecting*

into the objects we look at. The answer to the question 'What does the eye really see?' may well be 'Whatever it can focus upon'. But there is a further question, which is 'What do *we* see when our eyes focus upon this or that object?" And the answer to this second question is this: We see whatever our *minds* are focusing upon. We see whatever it is that our minds can make of the sense data the eye brings in.

But in thus attempting to dispose of the idea that in painting there should be any sort of dictatorship of the eye over the mind and imagination I do not wish to suggest that there is no such thing as visual truth, or what used to be called 'truth to Nature'. But no single style, no single version has a monopoly of the whole truth: each style seizes one aspect of the visual truth and enlarges it into a unique but quite 'unnaturalistic' pattern. But I am inclined to think that this process of enlarging and expanding a chosen aspect of visual reality is of more importance than the original choice of the aspect to be enlarged. In this sense I think that *how* we paint is of far greater consequence than *what* we paint—if only because *what* we paint, our subject, with all its poetry—depends entirely, for its pictorial existence, upon the success of the means by which it is communicated.

But this does not mean that I take the point of view of the pure abstractionists, the Constructivists as some of them are called, who deny the necessity for any subject at all. Most purely abstract artists believe that the plastic work of art should be entirely self-contained, that it should have no direct reference to any known object outside itself. To my mind this is a pictorial heresy. I do not believe that, in order to give full play to the marvellous and purely abstract features of form, colour and design, it is necessary to discard all evocation of external reality and to eschew all poetic comment upon a world of perfectly recognizable everyday objects and people. On the contrary I believe the function of painting at its highest level is the perpetual creation of a new fusion, a new marriage between the purely formal abstract entities on one side and the everyday world of commonplace but nevertheless magical realities on the other. A purely abstract shape is easy to invent. What is difficult, so difficult that only genius can fully accomplish it, is the forging of a new formal image out of familiar, well-known forms. The painter who looks at a tree or an apple or a human face and can immediately translate what he sees and feels into a new arrangement of colour and form; the painter who can react to his immediate sensation by turning it at once into a system of new formal devices—such a painter is enlarging our vocabulary of visual images.

But the new image, the new design which he arrives at must not have the strangeness or hardness of a pure invention, a pure abstraction unrelated to the familiar and kindly face of the natural world which surrounds us. It must be a new crystallization of the old familiar faces of tree, apple and human being; these eternal properties of human existence must permeate the new formal image, so that the well-known objects are felt to be peering through the somewhat triangular or rectilinear sharp abstract shapes—as they may be.

Consider for a moment a feature of the mechanics of literary expression: metaphor. Now, metaphor is surely the central miracle of poetry, indeed of verbal language itself: metaphor transforms things in a flash, simply by bringing *this* into contact with *that;* it creates a juxtaposition which is indeed equivalent in its effect to a chemical interaction of distinct elements: metaphor results in a compound. In the same way the sign of the great painter, the true innovator, is the translation, the transubstantiation, one might almost say, of the natural image which the eye sees into the marvellous potent unnatural image which is art. *Formal* metaphors and analogies are at the very heart of pictorial art: in art we look, not for reproduction (which, as I have said is, in any literal sense, an impossibility); nor for a semi-reproduction, a stylization of visual facts which leaves the naturalistic basis untouched while conferring a 'new look' on the subject reproduced. What we look for in painting is a *recreation* of the natural order; a significant transformation of everything which we experience through the eye.

Now I feel that, so far, everything I have said has been couched far too exclusively in a language of generalizations. From now on, therefore, I want to try to connect my argument with certain specific painters and paintings. These I have reproduced in the first eight plates of this book.

First of all, then, Plate 1. This is a newspaper photograph of a little lane in Hertfordshire, rising steeply from the waters of a ford and curving up and away, out of sight, among some dark overhanging elms. Although I know the place terribly well, it was a measurable fraction of a second before I recognized it in this photograph. This was not because anything in the picture is unfamiliar to me—I have sat balancing on those railings on the little bridge countless times and countless times I have looked over the fence on the right at the dahlias in what has always been a rich and well-kept garden. But never before have I looked at that road, at those railings, or at the tall elms, the thatched barn and the bush on the left *inside a frame of this shape.* The

whole arrangement, the whole composition which all these things make when they are cut off in precisely this way by the four edges of the composition—all this was quite new to me. To tell the truth, as the composition arranges itself in this photograph, the scene looks commonplace, anonymous; its intense personality, its particular quality, has dissolved; it has become a stock view of an ordinary 'beauty spot'. This is because the formal balance of different masses which the photographer has achieved is typical not of the place itself but of a balance we see in a great many photographs of this sort. As a pictorial composition it is the unconscious descendant of certain landscape painters of the English school—notably Constable: the formal arrangement or selection has been dictated entirely by the photographer's inability to discard a nineteenth-century English landscapist's way of seeing country lanes disappearing among tall trees. In this sense, then, even the photograph is a distortion: it selects one out of an infinite number of possible viewpoints. For determining the nature of that selection, the presence of an imaginative idea in the mind of the photographer is as indispensable as the presence of the external subject itself.

With Plate 2 we move to a painting by Constable—but one of similar tall trees, heavy and dark with summer leaves, like the elms in the photograph. At once we can see a few things which distinguish a painting by Constable from any photograph. Where the trees in the photograph were a dark, inert mass, rather moth-eaten at the edges where the sky begins to invade, these Constable trees are composed throughout by rhythmic, almost calligraphic, blobs and blotches which provide a wonderful dance for the eye. They compel movement in a responsive eye because they were themselves conceived in terms of movement—the movement of Constable's hand. Furthermore, these rhythmic, nervous, dancing touches of a lively but blunt brush all exaggerate the tones of Nature—the lighter touches jump right up the scale to near-whites; the darker passages go down much further than the dark patches in the trees the painter studied. And then in the matter of form, where the realistic tones of the photograph have to be squeezed, as it were, for any plastic value, Constable has translated every facet of the ambiguous natural tree-masses into terms of intensely felt plastic movement. Every square inch of Constable's foliage advances or recedes to an exactly determined position in space. Indeed, every touch defines not only the form of a particular part of a particular tree—it also, by so doing, defines the aerial space surrounding that

tree and separating it from its neighbours or from the artist, or from the far-off church tower or the low sides of the distant valley. Such plastic definition makes us feel an overwhelming sensation of space and relations in space: how does Constable arrive at plastic forms of such terrific veracity and force? If there is anything here which can fairly be called *distortion*, what is it? and how does it result in this intense impression of the naturalness of Nature?

Firstly, 'naturalness' is to be distinguished from 'naturalism'. The first is an essential characteristic of all good art, however formal or abstract: the second, 'naturalism', is often quite devoid of 'naturalness', for it is a striving towards effect or counterfeit. It is natural for a painter to draw and paint with a sort of writhing movement of the wrist; all good brushwork is a kind of pure scribble. Now Constable excels in scribble: and if one examines any passage in this landscape one finds it is composed entirely of an energetically nervous writhing of related scribbles—scribbles which, regarded closely and enjoyed in themselves, may be thought of as a purely abstract, non-figurative feature. Now the naturalistic painter, striving after the exact imitation of appearances, cannot let himself go in this way: his 'brushwriting' is stiff and restrained and he has had to inhibit the impulses of his hand to cover the canvas in its own unpredictable and, in a sense, uncontrollable manner. But the freedom of the hand and brush to do things which astonish their owner, the artist, this is a feature of most good painting of any school. Even the surfaces of a Vermeer or Velasquez contain this free brushwork, weaving its abstract rhythms back and forth within the framework of their peculiarly descriptive idioms. It is one of the ecstasies of painting—this independence of the hand from the brain! The brain tells the hand 'Draw in that tree, or that jug, but only use one brushload.' Then the hand rushes in rapid circles, makes dashes and dots and sudden lines of unexpected severity or weight. And suddenly the painter sees the mess that his hand has made of the job he gave it and he finds it is marvellous; and that is the ecstasy. Indeed, he finds it is far better than anything he could have thought out in advance and thought out only *in his head*. So painting is thinking with one's hand; or with one's arm; in fact with one's whole body!

But if Constable's painting is composed entirely of an abstract rhythmic dance of infinitely varied brushstrokes—there are certain respects in which he tied himself down to make a precise and undistorted record of what he saw. We can see that the general disposition of trees, sky or distant hills—indeed of every object in the composition

—we can see that in their approximate mass and approximate position they correspond as closely as Constable could make them to the optical image which their real counterparts in the real scene produced on his retina while he was looking at them. Constable, in other words, distorted the surfaces of objects while keeping their general drawing, their general proportions and relations, undistorted. Because he was true to Nature in this respect, his tremendously expressive distortions of the surface appearance and textures of objects have been overlooked. Even so, although the *effect* Constable gives is the effect of 'correct drawing', is the effect of landscape forms proportioned and arranged so that they correspond closely with Nature—we must not forget that it is necessary to distort in order to give the impression of non-distortion. The left-hand side of the distant valley rises with such a perfectly contrasted movement against the high trees on the right: and the bushes on the left foreground, rising also as they reach the edges of the picture, reinforce the upward movement of that left side of the valley so perfectly that we feel Constable may well have *bent* one or the other, or both, into this movement. The composition makes such a balancing movement imperative: whether or not it was a feature of this particular view is irrelevant.

An example of a different kind of distortion is provided by Turner. Besides giving his subject a texture that is just as unreal, strictly speaking, as Constable's, it is obvious that he has also interfered in the structure of each object. Turner wanted trees to be longer in the stem and more feathery at the crest than Nature usually provides them: and he also imposed his own rhythm upon the geological structure of his landscapes in a way that would have been quite against Constable's principles. However, what we lose in Constable's *immediacy*—the immediacy of impression—we gain in Turner's consciously elaborated structure. Where Constable was obsessed by the qualities inherent in direct vision, Turner was dominated by a grandiose poetry. If we cannot feel as much sympathy for this poetry—at any rate we acknowledge the genius he unfailingly showed in manipulating the extremely elaborate structure of an immense variety of natural forms. Of course, Turner was not content to reconstruct the sides of a ravine or the limbs of a tree without exaggerating all those features that would contribute to the grand poetic conception. We always find him emphasizing the stratification in rocks, water becomes more limpid, trees and bushes more sinuously clutching with their roots and waving with their branches than they are in Nature. As for his distortion of colour—he

might have been wearing smoked-glass or rose spectacles: yellows and reds and blues often overpower the more neutral greens and greys in a Turner; and blue is sometimes intensified almost to indigo to act, in a rather false way one feels, as a point of relief from the roseate mists.

The landscape by Christopher Wood (Plate 3) of a village in Brittany shows an unmistakable Cubist feeling blending remarkably with earlier landscape conventions. The scene is laid out in space in a way that corresponds very closely with scientific reality; that is to say a camera might corroborate the layout—first a high wall; behind that the church: then, the angle of vision expanding all the time and taking in more and more, the houses and near trees; and finally the little tree-fringed hilltops. Here is an orthodox reconstruction in space, well in accordance with scientific perspective. But when we come to the individual units in this construction we are aware of a departure in certain respects from scientific perspective. Each surface of the houses seems to turn its face towards us in the painting whether or not it quite faces us in the real scene; the sides as well as the near ends of the cottages seem to face in our direction—or to be swivelling round in an attempt to do so. Now this upending of receding planes is a most important feature of Cubism. While we know that the sides of the houses slope away, like the sides of the apse, the plane (by which they are indicated) is turning round in every case into a position that is more nearly parallel to the picture surface. As a result our consciousness of that surface is greatly reinforced. Surface design in modern painting is enhanced to a degree that is unparalleled since Piero della Francesca. Cézanne was the great innovator in this modern emphasis upon the surface, upon design: and of course his great Cubist successors have taken it very much further. But in noticing the presence of these semi-flatnesses in Christopher Wood we are jumping the vital stages; for Wood's approach to visual experience would have been impossible but for the fundamental changes achieved by Picasso and Braque.

The theme of this essay has been *distortion*: but not until we reach the Cubist *Head of A Man* (Plate 4), painted by Picasso in 1911, have we considered something that would not escape being called a 'distortion' by the majority of spectators in a public gallery. However that may be, this painting, and many like it, by Picasso or Braque, is based on a concrete visual experience: and if we contemplate the picture for a moment we shall begin to be susceptible to the original experience ourselves: we shall ourselves re-experience the artist's original sensation. Through the exquisitely proportioned triangular

planes, those fragments of a fractured surface, we feel the voluminous form of the head and shoulders assert itself. Into the various vee-shaped segments is compressed a great knowledge of the appearance of that head; and, also a powerful sensation of the solidity and structure of its form. Although the shapes which the artist has painted are conceived and executed essentially in terms of the picture surface, there is nothing arbitrarily decorative about them for the reason I have just given—the study of a real head was their origin. This stage of Picasso's and Braque's development has been labelled Analytical Cubism, and the name is apt. The reduction of natural images of solid objects to terms of the picture surface is the main operation at this stage. Real objects were condensed into crystal-like facets without changing their character: that is—once you are able to read the system of broken surfaces, you are in touch again with a normal subject—a figure, head or still life. The subject of a Cubist painting like this one is simply lurking behind a somewhat prismatic glass screen, as it were. You do not feel the subject has *itself* been tampered with: indeed the head in this painting feels much nearer to a real head, in proportion and in poetic character, than the trees in a Turner are to real trees. At this stage the Cubist masters were elaborating a new language, not inventing new versions of their subjects—that came later.

There is a picture of Picasso's painted in 1924 entitled *Still Life with a Black Head* (Plate 5). In works such as this a new *kind* of distortion is evident. Where the fluttering, crackling planes in the earlier portrait head I have just been considering were in some sense planes floating *in front* of a normal head—where distortion appeared in the means of presentation but not in the head that was presented—in this *Still Life with a Black Head* we see Picasso altering the shapes of the objects he depicts, as it were *in his mind, before* he paints them. This guitar is a curiously *crushed* guitar; the white fruit-dish is beginning to *move*, to slip and slide into a different shape—it is rather like a huge porcelain door knob on the table; or a horizontally grooved sea pebble. By 1920 the objects in paintings by Braque and Picasso had begun to undergo a metamorphosis *as objects*. It was not simply that, as with the earlier Analytical Cubism, the mere rendering of the visual image was changing. By 1920 the objects themselves were beginning to undergo the strangest and most exciting transformation. Thus in its eternal struggle against the objective eye, with its scientific account of things, it was the imagination which had gained a round or two in the advent of Cubist painting. A table before an open window; a strip of music

fluttering on the red, patterned tablecloth; a black bronze head, a slice of cantalupe and a guitar—all the objects in the picture are transformed, re-created: they have taken on a new and independent existence, supported by new and immensely powerful rhythms which explode their original individual forms—then blow them together again in a new configuration. Out of the old shapes into the new: they are all remoulded: all swim together in a new formal harmony, each form dovetailing into its neighbour; each object pushing into, and distorting, the shape of the object next to it. And this is an immensely important principle in painting: in its highest manifestations pictorial composition shows a common interdependence at work among all the different forms, all the contrasted objects in a picture. The rhythms of one affect the rhythms of other, adjacent forms: none exist in formal isolation: if the window frame in *Still Life with a Black Head* lurches to the right, the echoing table-leg re-establishes the essential balance of the whole by leaning to the left. If the white fruit-dish seems just to have swooped down, like a violent pigeon, from somewhere up behind the immobile black bust, almost biffing the guitar before coming to rest in the middle of the table, the guitar has quickly responded by huddling down tighter and closer to the tablecloth—it has even developed a point specially to rebut the threatened advance of the swift white dish—which incidentally reminds one of the hull and keel of a racing-yacht; and in this case the slice of melon is somehow the sails also.

And this is another point—the *analogy* that is possible in such semi-abstract forms. Once we get to the stage where the object, whatever it is, has been truly transmuted, truly metamorphosed, so to speak, we find that all kinds of suggestion become possible, *in a single* form. Indeed I do not see that the distortions in a picture like this would be at all exciting if it were not for the endless subtle suggestions, ambiguities, parallels, half-reminders, and the *formal* analogy and generalization which it throws up. You may think my fruit-dish-into-yacht suggestion is far-fetched. But this sudden extraordinary suggestiveness is precisely what I enjoy in such a work as this. In this picture I feel the atmosphere of the sea permeating everything. The flat blueness which fills out the open window-frame and somehow pushes and bulges in past it, into the room itself, spilling chunks of itself all over the table so that parts of the table legs, for instance, are like broken-off bits of 'sky' which lie glowing in the ruddy, dim interior—that blueness spells 'the sea'. The near, all-pervading, invisible sea.

I turn now to Georges Braque, to a superbly tranquil yet dramatic still life, *Plate of Oysters* (Plate 6), which dates from the 'thirties. Three oysters in closed shells, on a plate, a carafe containing water and a long French loaf are the sole occupants of the green table in front of a panelled wall. Yet what drama these generate between them. We feel that Braque has uncovered the soul of each object—so strangely animated, so full of meaning is each of these inanimate things. Like Picasso, Braque expels the atmosphere of the explainable, optimistic daylight world. Like Picasso he sets everything he touches in an essentially supernatural context. Though his objects are very much the commonplace objects that are the furniture of our daily lives, the atmosphere he creates is an intensely imaginative—indeed one might say, a spiritual one. These loaves and plates and water-bottles are bristling with some potent metaphysical meaning. They draw attention, in a largely scientific age, to the essential wonder and mystery of which the most commonplace objects are the repository. And, after absorbing Braque, one's surroundings become alive again, as they were in one's childhood: the interior of a tram or a night café; the parlour of a suburban villa or the flashy bar of a large hotel; a repulsive chromium-plated handle or a phoney 'wrought-iron' lamp—almost everything is invested with fresh imaginative possibilities. I find that Braque often has the same effect upon me in this respect as a poem by T. S. Eliot. The drab, pretentious, vulgar side of our twentieth-century urban civilization is to some extent redeemed by the action of such art. Eliot, whose images are predominantly urban (in the earlier poems particularly), has, it seems to me, many remarkable affinities with Braque: these cannot, however, be explored here.

Next, *The Duet* (Plate 7), a painting by Braque dating from 1937: two women with a piano in a small room. One of the great contrasts between Braque and Picasso is that Picasso is quick and Braque is slow. One can feel how slowly such a complex composition as this has been arrived at, and arrived at almost entirely in terms of silhouettes. Picasso captures much the same spirit in his rapidly executed pictures; every division of form is indicative of the speed of working—a speed dictated by the fleeting nature of his vision. But Braque's images have not been spilt on the canvas in this way: they are slowly, even laboriously built up and they have as a result a quality of calm permanence. The wide, vacant pieces of the design combine with the rambling, slowly traced silhouettes to produce the feeling of order; an order hard won, but nevertheless secure. I think that, confronted with the figures

of the two women in this painting, it is not difficult to respond to a certain disquiet. They have, unmistakably, the power of living presences. They have an unmistakable psychic aura. In their overlapping silhouettes the physical and the supernatural seem to hobnob with the greatest success and naturalness. And that, after all, is simply a parallel to the curious case of real human beings. The lady on the left is a most impressive example of the 'double profile'. In dovetailing a side view of her—the silhouette in black—into the three-quarter front view (which is a pale mauve, almost iridescent, in the original) Braque creates not only the physical sense of movement, the suggestion that, as she sings, she is swaying and even swivelling slightly in her chair; he also seems to be symbolizing our double nature; the fact that one version of a person resides *inside* another, rather different version; the fact that the Soul inhabits the Body. That is one reason why I call him a metaphysical, an intensely spiritual artist. Always Braque extracts an essence, the essence which is called 'Personality', out of everything he touches: not only in the case of human beings but with tables, jugs, chairs, anything—it is always the heightened sense of each object's special nature—its separate existence—that emerges from these paintings.

The still life in Plate 8, with a pot of spring flowers on a sky-blue tablecloth, backed by the varnished wood boards of a wall or partition, draws our attention to an opposition of light and dark in Braque's more recent paintings. It is an opposition of considerable symbolic force. The left-hand part of the picture is in flat darkness: it is inhabited only by the brown ghost of a complicated sort of chair, or perhaps a part of an easel with palette and set-square hanging from it. The yellow-green leaf shapes at the bottom of the light, right half of the painting are the front part of the elaborate straw seat of an upright chair, which we are looking down on: the two yellow forms with the spiral marking are the tops of the very thick, round, light-coloured wooden front legs of this chair. What I find particularly exciting is the joyful explosion of the flower-pot—an explosion made visible by the artist's use of a lace mat with zig-zagging edges. The whitish zig-zags of the mat have suggested another zig-zag movement inside the first and immediately surrounding the profile of the pot itself. This is in dark green and at first seems a form attributable to 'artistic licence' alone. I mean that whereas the whitish teeth of the bigger, outer zig-zag have the excuse of the lace mat for their existence, the darker, smaller, green teeth that flame out of the very ordinary pot-shape—these seem

attributable only to the painter's fancy, to his desire to make the pot the centre of an explosion. But actually this dark green zig-zag fringe to the pot is part of a larger shape: you will see that a dark green patch bounded by six straight lines lies just behind the stems of the flowers—rather in the same formal relation to the pot of flowers that a nimbus bears to a saint's head. What is this dark green shape, which extends itself down round the sides of the pot in that ragged zig-zag of a fringe? I suggest that it is the shadow of the pot and the flowers thrown, first, just behind it along the table, and then, flat on the vertical boards of the wall at the back. There is nearly always a clue to Braque's forms, to an origin in some particular aspect of the real subject. The most arbitrary thing in this picture, from *this* point of view, is the big zig-zag from top to bottom of the canvas which marks off the area of black on the left. But how expressive it is! The explosion of light on the main objects—the pot and the mat—has thrown back the dark, which reels and retires to the left behind its zig-zag frontier. Nevertheless, the drama in Braque never leads to rapid gestures in the design itself—as is true of Picasso. Braque's tranquil, evenly plotted lines wander, string-like yet electric, dividing the facets of design, contributing towards the perfect and tranquil balance of the whole.

In the part of this essay which has been concerned with modern painting I have limited the discussion to Braque and Picasso. There are many kinds of modern painting quite untouched upon here. I have stuck to Picasso and Braque because they are the least heretical of moderns. They stand, together with Bonnard and Matisse, right in the centre of a development that has become established as the main tradition of great painting in our time. With the literary painters—the Surrealists—on one side of them and the over-cerebral, the over-rational Constructivists—the purely abstract—on the other, Picasso and Braque hold the fort for the greatest of all pictorial traditions. Faced with the challenge of their successors ('successors' in point of time only)—the non-figurative painters of the present moment—the art of Braque and Picasso upholds two principles. First, the subject is vital; and second, the abstract music of colour and form is vital. With them the task of genius is, therefore, now as always, to fuse the two elements in such a way that a new vision of reality is created. The wind of poetry blows stronger than ever before. This new vision of everyday realities has achieved a simplicity, a breadth and freedom of rhythm that will strike a future generation as one of the most profoundly natural and spontaneous moments in the history of art.

The future spectator will be as little critical of the distortion in Braque or Picasso as we are of the distortion in Cézanne or Michelangelo. And it will be for the same reason—he will barely be conscious that it *is* distortion.

2

HILLS AND FACES

Ivon Hitchens and Peter Lanyon

MODERN painting has been revolutionary in a number of respects. For instance, it has completely changed our conception of space; or, to be more precise, it is our *experience* of space that seems to have been affected; for we are dealing here with aesthetic sensation, not scientific theory. Again, modern painting has bestowed strange new rôles on the painter's subject-matter—on the objects his forms evoke. But there remain two provinces of pictorial expression which the practice of the moderns has left comparatively untouched: portraiture and landscape. The evocation of a particular person is a portrait—and I say *evocation* rather than *representation.* Now the forms of modern painting have tended on the whole to generalize rather than particularize, so that a Cubist portrait would reduce a special, individual face to its formal, structural components, to those aspects which it most nearly shares with every other face, thus stripping it of much of its personality. That is the formal reason for the absence from modern idioms of anything one could call portraiture. But there is also a psychological reason; which is that the modern painter has been so exclusively preoccupied with the strange, the uncivilized, the 'mysteriously other' (as D. H. Lawrence would have called it)—in point of fact, with the upsurging contents of his newly discovered subconscious—that he has had no time to evolve a language for conveying anything so near at hand, so ubiquitous and ordinary, anything

so remote from the quality he associates with the savage ancestry of the race as his wife, brother, mother or friend. Picasso's portrait of Gertrude Stein, painted in the first years of the century, is probably the last painting in which the sitter and 'art' are present in equal strength. Thereafter the two parted company; and they have frequented different circles ever since. Where you get art, in the first part of the twentieth century, you get fauns, satyrs, piles of bricks, pin-and-needle-men, or hieroglyph-like figures which, although unquestionably alive, animated, indeed animistic, have still no pretensions to the function of a portrait. Man figures in twentieth-century painting as one more piece of furniture in a still life: he is not the centre of consciousness any longer; on the contrary, he shares the sort of twilit consciousness which the inanimate objects in a Braque or Picasso still life manifest and which is, for such things as a rush-bottomed chair or a coffee-pot, something of a promotion in what might be called the hierarchy of consciousness. But for a human being to be represented as being no less and no more animated than a curiously alive candlestick or jug is certainly not a compliment to human kind as such. Thus, in the most vital art of the last four decades, man relegates himself to the status of the semi-animate, the half-living, the ghost-like: he sees himself as a stick of furniture, being jostled like a rickety umbrella-rack. If his image of himself here or there regains a forceful vitality commensurate in any sense with full human personality, then it is the primitive, aggressive, lustful vitality of a pagan god that informs it: this is the most obvious sort of vitality possessed by the figures in Picasso's recent work, for whom sexual virility or fecundity are the paramount virtues. One might almost say that the subtler qualities in men and women less often find a pictorial equivalent in Picasso's figuration of persons than in his pictures of inanimate objects.

That this is so is not the fault of the artist—or, rather, it is no *more* his fault than it is everybody else's. In many ways the artist is necessarily passive: an instrument, merely, for registering the vibrations that inhabit what might be called the spiritual ether. For the creative mind at any given moment there are only certain given forms and modes of expression at hand to be made use of. We find ourselves limited and controlled at a specific moment in time by our position in a spiritual landscape which is at least as effective in determining the course of our imaginative movements as the physical landscape is in defining the

possible wanderings of our bodies. At a given moment, those aspirations for which no *form* is naturally and semi-consciously forthcoming are doomed to remain inarticulate as art, however much they may commend themselves directly to the conscious mind. It is a limitation of this sort, which none can escape, which is responsible for the absence of happy humanity from the canvases of the moderns. Thus Braque's ladies barely come to life as people though they have plenty of mysterious personality of the kind common to all Braque's inanimate objects. Picasso's people are alarmingly unhappy: they seem unshielded from the contemplation of some cosmic disaster which the rest of us cannot see, perhaps because it is in the future—a dimension which is free to them, however; they reflect its events in their shattered physiognomies. On the other hand, when the human inhabitants of Picasso's canvases are happy or normal, the vision and technique involved in presenting them seem little more than brilliant pastiche of the vision and technique of an earlier master. Rouault's people are all anguished as well as ugly, diseased and dirty. Matisse's young women are streamlined into their delightful and luxurious settings—much as American film stars are in reality; but Matisse does attempt to record physical beauty and even succeeds in relating modern taste in the exterior appearance of women to a dignified and subtle aesthetic vision. But possibly Bonnard alone has created normality in vital terms, and so provides the exception to the rule.

In England Matthew Smith has occasionally painted a portrait in which the sitter's personality and presence do *co-exist* with a pictorial structure possessing vitality, distinction and strength. Yet even then the particularity of the person in question is muted, blunted into conformity with a somewhat blunt and summary design. Smith's women sitters seem, in paint, to have the pithy, vegetable succulence of an arum lily or a melon. In any case, the idiom he employs is pre-Cubist: and it is the lack of a Cubist or post-Cubist portraiture, or humanism, which I am deploring. Again Wyndham Lewis's portraits do not meet the case: they are, even when a likeness is achieved, basically non-Cubist; they represent a stylistic departure from realism, not a re-creation of form and space. Nor do Graham Sutherland's portraits of Somerset Maugham and Lord Beaverbrook convince me. Here 'personality' has indeed been expressed; something of the character of the two sitters has been made evident to the spectator. But in the almost total absence of pictorial qualities of merit or significance. The naïve and very unpractised form of realism (insecure drawing, banal

composition, etc.) of these two portraits does anything but meet the requirements I am here discussing. This artist's excellence lies in a very different direction.

I said just now that the artist is in some respect a passive instrument. He is. Yet this aspect of the creative function is possibly too much emphasized nowadays: we must not forget that the artist is also an ordinary man; and that every one of his faculties is relevant to the problem of the direction his art shall take. In other words, he is no more helpless in the face of his 'inspiration' than he is in any practical situation in which he must exercise judgement. It is always incumbent upon the artist that—in some way and on some level—he concern himself with the most permanent if not the most pressing of human problems. I am not thinking of anything so crude as politics: and by 'concern himself' I mean an oblique, not a direct, concern. Art is art and cannot be directed to an end alien to its own spirit—whatever that spirit may be. But I feel that the artist will operate most significantly if he has not *consciously excluded* the host of ordinary human problems from his mind. All this may seem a negation of one of the most sacred of modern beliefs—the belief in the autonomy of the aesthetic, and, equally, of its detachment from ethics. But is it?

Ethics are after all no more than the aesthetics of behaviour. A fully imaginative and responsible (i.e. ethical) act generates its own aesthetic, its own beauty. I cannot help feeling that the detachment of certain forms of abstract art from the 'mire and blood' of so much human feeling and experience is impoverishing the aesthetic realm, now that their original employment (as a means for purifying the language of visual communication) is no longer necessary—or possible. It should now be feasible for an artist who has, in the course of his development, genuinely embraced the successive movements in the vital art of our time to turn once more to the anciently valid task of exploring the personality, the appearance, and the 'meaning' of a particular person, a fellow-creature: in a word, to create the modern portrait.

And now I must turn to the second kind of painting that the modern movement has as yet found little place for: landscape. Landscape cannot be abstract, any more than the portrait can be. In dealing with landscape one is not dealing with space and form in isolation: the landscape that is not a particular landscape, a special place, is not a landscape at all. The spirit of place, the personality, the smile or frown of a parti-

cular piece of the terrain is as vital a component as the architecture, the structure or configuration of the scene.

It is true that space can itself become *an experience*, irrespective, almost, of the solid masses by which it is, nevertheless, defined. I can look from the studio window across the waters of St. Ives Bay at the thin yellowness which is Lelant sands, and my sensation that there is an intervening mass of transparent air can become a more potent factor in my consciousness than the floating image of Lelant sandhills themselves, crowned as they are by the coronet of the top six feet of Lelant church tower emerging from behind them, upon which I am actually focusing. To communicate an experience of this kind the modern painter may 'distort' the sandhills: or he may render the air itself as a solid. Again—to give another concrete example of the sort of sensation and experience which is the *raison d'être* of certain new devices in painting—I may swivel my head momentarily away from the open window, with its prospect of the Bay, and for two seconds may absorb visual realities of a very different order: the reddish outline of a near chair cutting up and across the white of a piece of the wall, then becoming a silhouette against a patch of alternating dark brown and white stripes or bars—the back of another chair further off; a Windsor. And this, momentarily perceived and registered, becomes an integral part of my apprehension of reality—of the reality that surrounds me at this particular moment. Since 'reality' itself, and nothing short of it, is the 'subject' of my picture, this sudden consciousness of the interior of my room, obtruding, as it did, into a moment devoted to the contemplation of space in the Bay, might, also, clearly be registered upon my canvas. And not that only: all its memories, whether visual or not in kind, which the present moment—the moment of composition—can possibly call up, have for that reason only (i.e. that they *have been* called up) an absolute right of entry into the painting, because it is the work of the moment. Whatever one is painting is the record of a moment—a moment in which reality was apparent to one, and in which visual pictorial terms were placed at one's disposal for transcribing the experience. The picture is finished when 'the moment' is exhausted, delimited, revealed as an organic whole, a complete entity, which has drawn to itself as much as (but no more than) it can lay hands on of one's total experience to date.

So painting is not concerned exclusively with space; or with anything else for that matter. Some modern artists have loved space so exclusively that they have conceived the purely abstract, and thus

deprived space and form of their natural context. Taken from their setting in the world of recognizable objects, these twin qualities of space and form lose half their power: for it was precisely because it co-existed with the sensation of Lelant sandhills that my awareness of an abstract entity—connected in my mind with a particular volume of aerial space—was so valuable; or indeed was of any value at all. Only when it co-exists with the particular has the generalized, or abstract,[1] any lasting power to affect us. And for this reason the purely abstract force locked up in a Tintoretto, for instance, is more potent than the overt abstraction of a Constructivist. But then, of course, the Tintoretto is not impoverished by an arbitrary intellectual ban on all but the architectural component: the rich poetry of association was free to enhance the abstract forces in a Tintoretto—as it would enhance a modern painting whose author was not constrained by theory from incorporating such an 'impure' element.

A possible explanation of the modern painter's neglect of landscape lies in the fact that the open spatial sequences of landscape are more difficult to re-create in terms of that tightly organized design at the picture surface which modern instinct demands than are the relatively enclosed spaces of still life (and this is a theory I have entertained in connection with the painting of Ivon Hitchens and Peter Lanyon—two artists who are still practically alone in attempting to translate landscape into post-Cubist terms). But I think the real reason may be less technical than this—and Lanyon has himself suggested that it may be. I think that the modern painter has failed to create a language for landscape for the very simple reason that in order to paint landscape one has to look outside oneself—and it has for long been an unquestioned tenet of modern art that the major source of creative ideas lies within; that inspiration is mainly subjective. The modern artist is adept at facing the midnight terrors of his own soul: indeed, Picasso has made nightmare more commonplace than daylight photography; we might almost at times have claimed that nocturnal phantasy had triumphed over all else. But it is not really true that the main source of inspiration lies within: nor does it lie without, of course. The real source of inspiration lies at that point at which the inner and the outer intersect, meet and wrestle in an endeavour each to be interpreted into terms of

[1] Successfully to delimit the meaning of *abstract* in relation to contemporary art another essay was necessary. In *Space in Contemporary Painting and Architecture* I have tried to explain my enthusiasm for certain 'abstract' painters.

the other. The achieved correspondence of objective with subjective is the goal.

At the present time this balance, this correspondence, is tipped far too heavily in favour of subjectivity: hence the flood of academic abstract art in which the tension between the inner and the outer, or the imaginary and the real, is missing. Nothing frightens a modern painter more than the challenge of exterior appearances. Sooner or later he will have to find a mode of 'study', a means of communing direct with Nature. When this moment arrives we shall see the re-birth of landscape painting and portraiture. The much-heralded (in England only, however) return of a debased, naturalistic, outmoded form of 'realism' is, of course, beside the point. In art it is impossible to *go back*. Even academic non-figuration has therefore more vitality than this 'new realism'—which is usually 'social realism' in disguise, and is thus politically inspired.

Now, 'landscape' is an unfolding spatial configuration which opens outwards from the point on which one is standing and is only limited by the horizon. In the past, the landscape painter has worked within a more or less scientifically endorsed scheme of perspective, as a frame of reference. He has drawn the horizontal division between earth and sky (the horizon) across his canvas, thus dividing it into two distinct areas highly dissimilar in colour, texture, tone and in formal content.

But this way of treating the picture surface offends the instinct of most modern painters because it precludes all but the most obvious and boring arrangements of that picture surface: and, since Cézanne, the creation of design at the picture surface as well as in depth has been an over-riding necessity, an irresistible impulse or desire.

Cubist, Fauve or Constructivist painting all subscribes to this Cézannesque canon: the picture surface must be an organic, cohesive entity, animated and compelling. For this reason—as I have already suggested—much of the best modern painting is still life painting: the relatively enclosed spatial sequences of still life are more easily reconciled to the demands of the picture surface than are the less tangible, less easily formalized open spatial realities of landscape. I said that Ivon Hitchens and the much younger Peter Lanyon were still almost alone in attempting a reconciliation between the still life values of modern painting and the demands of landscape. If this looks a large claim to make for these English contemporaries we may recall the almost total absence of a landscape vision in present French painting. In France the

predominantly still life idiom of Cubism has now given way very largely to the non-figurative schemes of many of the best post-war painters—de Staël, Soulages, Estève for example—which are, of course, neither 'landscape' nor 'still life', basically: though often approximating to one or the other. On the other hand, Hitchens and Lanyon are scarcely rivalled, in this preoccupation with a post-Cubist idiom for landscape, as I call it, by other English painters—unless we think of Ben Nicholson's very beautiful landscapes-in-still-life, or the recent abstractions of John Wells or Terry Frost, both based on landscape experiences. We have, certainly, a number of other, spatially more conventional, landscape painters: Sutherland for instance. But he is concerned not with the spatial, plastic, architectural values which a derivative of, or descendant from, Cubism must emulate (as do both Hitchens and Lanyon, most certainly) but rather with some form of magic. The magical presence of a rather gothic, and certainly a vegetable, form is Sutherland's special concern.

IVON HITCHENS

To my mind Ivon Hitchens is in many respects the most important English painter now living. But he is certainly an isolated figure. In a country where painting is understood primarily in terms of literature, if at all; where critics still react first and foremost to what they call the 'mood' or 'atmosphere' of a painting, instead of to its pictorial qualities, its palpable visual reality; where realism in some form, romantic or otherwise, is perennially in favour—*and*, therefore, where realism's opposite, pure non-figurative abstraction, is also very acceptable—a painter in whom all the virtues of the central tradition in Western painting are so strong is bound to appear lonely. The English understand pure abstraction, or Constructivism, because it is an art dominated by theories (and to that extent it too is 'literary'): their fear of the sensuous is not aroused—as it is both by Fauvism and Cubism. Neither of these movements has ever been understood, to any significant degree, by the English. Those who have admired one or other of these schools have never been capable of embracing their whole meaning: Matthew Smith emulated the exuberant spontaneity but not the intellectual discipline of Matisse. Wyndham Lewis's Vorticism was devoid of the sensuous validity, the visual reality, of Braque or Picasso. And we have had lesser 'Fauves' and 'Cubists': but either their understanding of the grammar of their great masters is so shallow as to appear amateur; or they follow too far, and break their connection with

their English environment—which native setting *must*, obliquely if not directly, provide the principal source of inspiration for an English artist. The artist has, of course, two major sources upon which he draws all the time: art and nature. That stimulant, that nourishment which he draws from the art of others should be taken from whatever quarter contains it in the most concentrated form. And since such material is in greater abundance in Paris than anywhere else on Earth at the present time, there is, inescapably, an international traffic in aesthetic ideas in the world to-day with Paris as its centre. But then the artist must also draw upon 'life' or 'nature' or 'reality' direct: the aesthetic concepts he absorbs from works of art are valueless to him if he cannot use them as tools for grappling with his own, essentially private, experience in the face of nature. The best art in any Western country has, therefore, at once an international and an intensely local character.

In England the painting of Ivon Hitchens is the most distinguished example of this necessary fusion. The result, as I hope to explain, is both brilliantly original and profoundly traditional. And, of course, that fusion (a post-Cubist grammar of form and a post-Fauve science of symbolic colour are the means Hitchens has used to convey his exceptionally sensitive response to Sussex millstreams and copses) denies the English critic both the categories he likes best. For Hitchens is concerned neither with the illusionistic rendering of appearances nor with an empty pattern, a mere organization of the picture surface. What he is concerned to create is a visual harmony or counterpoint which is itself the only possible statement of a set of visual experiences of the Sussex landscape. Nor is such 'visual experience' of a passive nature: the painter who is passive, merely opening and shutting his receptive eyes, like a camera, to trap an image, is only a realist. But Hitchens, like the best painters everywhere, is engaged in a subtle act of empathy at every stage. The upward surge of the white birch trunk is not captured as a dead fact by a photographic eye. It is translated into movement—into the upward swing of a large brush. And the taut, precise yet generously ample stroke of pale yellow-grey which results on the canvas is itself expressive of movement in time: it has a beginning and an end: it measures itself, in terms both of movement and of time, against all the other brushstrokes in the picture.

Indeed, there is no area of scribbled paint which does not, in a Hitchens, immediately make itself felt not only as something registering forms in space; not only as evoking a branch, or the 'air-pocket'

between trees; but as movement in time. The rhythmic strokes can only be fully interpreted, fully enjoyed, as *rhythm*. One unravels the strokes that have gone into the formation of a particular mass (the soft-rounded mass of a knob of birch foliage perhaps), and the unravelling itself takes time, itself becomes a movement with its intervals, its jerks and its intermittent flowings. All this one apprehends from the frozen brushstrokes, whether in Cézanne, Rubens, Constable or Hitchens: it is the justification for the use of the word *rhythm*. Of the English painters of his generation, Hitchens has by far the strongest pulse, the most articulate rhythm.

Ivon Hitchens has his own unique vocabulary of pictorial forms; it consists of the brilliantly sure arrangement in depth of flat screens of colour, one behind the other, all more or less parallel to the picture surface and all evocative of receding, separate objects related in space. This is his typical formal idiom, whether the screens evoke objects in an interior—he has painted many nudes—or objects in a landscape. But the confined space and the single mass of a nude study are less readily interpreted in such terms than are, for instance, the hanging curtains of silver birch trees. So Hitchens is essentially a landscape painter (even his exquisite flower still lifes are somehow extended into the spatial dimensions of landscape). And this is the special mark of his distinction: for, as I have said, he is almost the only true landscapist whose idiom may be described as post-Cubist. And by calling this idiom 'post-Cubist' I am not claiming that stylistic affinities between Hitchens and, say, Braque are important; or even that they exist. There is nothing rectilinear or rigid, for instance, in Hitchens's work. The alignment is more fundamental. It is that Hitchens conceives of all solid, rotund forms in terms of the flat screens of colour-tone of which I have spoken.

Another mark of his distinction is that, among British painters over fifty, Hitchens alone, it seems to me, has gone from strength to strength, deepening and intensifying his vision, so that an unquestionably organic development is felt to have been the means which transformed the early Hitchens canvases into the later. But with his most distinguished English contemporaries there is no such progressive strengthening of vision, no equivalent continuity of growth—Henry Moore excepted, of course. And it strikes me that possibly the one and only thing which Moore and Hitchens have in common—a genius, in terms of their respective materials, for *sensuous* expressiveness—is the one absolutely indispensable quality which must accompany any talent,

if early brilliance is to be superseded by maturity. Hitchens is the most sensuous British painter of our time: whereas his most brilliant rivals are conspicuously lacking in this quality. Nicholson (not without great beauty in the result) treats oil-paint as if it were, alternatingly, water-colour, or a stone surface to be carved: Sutherland tries to make oil-paint function like a dye or a coloured ink.

Now Hitchens's more sensuous approach involves him in treating oil-paint with a greater respect for its inherent quality. In fact, his best pictures achieve the ideal identification of vision and technique which is the mark of pure mastery. In his canvases we do not feel that there is any destroying dichotomy, in which one is conscious of two separate entities imperfectly overlapping—i.e. the work as conceived and as executed. The passionate sideways stabbing of a large blunt brush, loaded with a dull yet luminous olive mixture, registers the near (so near, it is almost out of focus) curved, lower branch of a pine tree in terms of a broad, fuzzy arc of olive paint. A second stab, and there we see a second branch, exactly ten feet behind the first, but less fuzzy, more in focus; and greener, perhaps, because of some play of the light, as it filters down through the furry, blue-green layers of the pine tree. The point is: the stabbed arc of greeny-olive paint *is* the pine branch. You are not made conscious of an object (the pine branch) and at the same time left unconscious of the actual paint that evokes it: that would be the fallacy of realism, which aims at an illusionistic rendering of natural appearances. Nor, on the other hand, are you conscious of some paint on canvas, but not conscious of the pine branch: that would be the fallacy of 'pure abstraction'. Instead, you are conscious of the branch as paint. In such duality lies the central tradition I have mentioned.

A piece of Sussex woodland in sight of the South Downs is the place of work of this fine artist whose poetry is so natural, and whose paint is so expressive of pure sensation, that none of the fashionable tidal waves could ever buoy him up. He has had to swim for himself.

The chief trouble, I suppose, was the total absence in his work of any element of disquiet: he has never asked for more than the right to contemplate the movement of the flickering, inconstant English light over the pools and streams, the woodland trees and the vibrant under-growth and bracken of his chosen ground. The traditional reaction of painters to the visible world is one of joy: a simple attitude, which Hitchens shares with Renoir, Cézanne or Matthew Smith. But just as

unusual at present as this special innocence of the painter is a belief in observation, in visual study as the fount of pictorial inspiration—and this, too, Hitchens shares with the painters of ages other than our own. The exterior landscape is always his point of departure. Though he arrives at a very considerable measure of abstraction he never translates the trees and fields of the daylight world into their dream-world equivalents, a thing Graham Sutherland might be said to do. This transmutation of the familiar into the unfamiliar is certainly the most characteristic operation of much of the greatest art of our time, and no one doubts the validity of the disquiet in Picasso or Henry Moore: a gigantic upsurge of new meanings has determined the nature and quality of all their images. But so long as this note of disquiet predominated in the poetry of important artists such as these, we were inclined to overlook the sense of serenity elsewhere, in, for instance, Braque; and Bonnard's happiness, too, is so composed, yet intense, that he is frequently relegated to a past with which, it is felt, he must have more in common. This is a grave injustice, for aesthetically Bonnard was as vital a modern as any to the day of his death. In design, he was possibly as great an innovator as Matisse. Ivon Hitchens's reputation also suffers, then, in the climate that at present prevails. If the study of landscape in terms of near-abstraction is Hitchens's special contribution, we can assert that no one else evinces the same balance of interests: the pursuit of pure tonal colour and the most formal notation of plastic realities on the one hand, and the concern with a poetically faithful presentation of landscape on the other. The first of these interests is more typical of the art of the present moment than the second: indeed, of half a dozen living British painters whose work should entitle them to a measure of respect on the Continent and elsewhere, Hitchens is the most concerned with that traditional subject of our painting—the English landscape itself. Others among his contemporaries, having like himself perceived and accepted many of the values of the modern masters in France, borrowed something in the way of subject-matter as well. Though jugs in dark profile are no part of his repertoire, Hitchens's awareness of Braque has been no less acute—although different—than Ben Nicholson's: in a Hitchens composition, depth, I will repeat, is achieved, as in a Braque, by means of a series of overlapping planes, all of which are parallel to the surface of the canvas.

Combining many of the virtues of abstract painting with a representation of landscape, Hitchens has discovered a 'pictorial equivalent' for a silver-birch copse or willow-fringed millpond which

sacrifices nothing of the English landscapist's traditional love of place. We are put in touch with the Sussex pool or stream, and informed, for instance, about its reflected lights, *at the same instant* that we also enjoy an abstract visual harmony of real distinction. A flat scribble in a dull olive mixture, with a ragged edge that bites beautifully against the white ground: a single slash, very smooth by contrast, of ceruleum: some little leaf-shaped flicks of cadmium yellow: a huge blob of deep rust-red, made by a single stab with a large brush—such are the 'abstract' units employed. They are not unrelated to the brushwork on Sung pots. The precise quality of his paint is always uppermost in this painter's consciousness, one feels. Whether it is applied in thin transparent washes on a white ground, or is scrubbed with rhythmic strokes, in a thicker paste, his colour has a brilliancy and, above all, a luminosity reminiscent of Matisse. The quality of flat but glowing washes is pre-eminent. There are times, however, when it must be said that the more sumptuous elements of his design seem to get on top: then what is essentially a calligraphic touch tends to degenerate into flourish. Or perhaps the necessary tension between the concrete subject and the abstract design may become relaxed. A bad Hitchens is one in which each opulent statement of the well-laden brush has come apart from the forms it is supposed to be describing—there in the picture-world—and has floated up, so to speak, to the surface of the canvas, which it merely adorns like a loose textile design.

In 1950 Hitchens devoted a whole exhibition to a series of paintings of the female nude. This was an abrupt departure from his landscape and still life subjects. With these nudes three categories of 'change' were in evidence. Firstly, there were instances in which the subject was the only thing that had changed: in a study called *Figure in the Open*, the breasts, head and body were evoked with precisely those flat areas of soft, resonant, scribbled colour, nervously expressive at their explosive, spluttered edges, by which Hitchens projects the vibrant volumes of foliage in his landscapes. In this picture the voluminous forms of the nude body had been *exchanged*, simply, with those of his willows and birches: the visual reaction, to a different subject, had itself remained the same. This is not quite satisfactory, of course. An impartial eye which reacts in essentially the same way before such different stimuli as a nude woman and a tree is *too* impartial, too detached. Against 'significant form' we might therefore assert 'significant essence'—or, the 'personality of objects', animate or inanimate.

Though I would only very rarely accuse Hitchens of this, mere *form* may often be no more than a sluggish common denominator between the most disparate realities, dissolving the identities of, say, a female breast, half a lemon or the dome of a railway engine, in a few formal generalizations of design. So, though Hitchens's tree-woman was quite as lovely as his less anthropomorphic landscapes, it was a still keener curiosity that led us to those nudes in which the nude itself had forced the formal issue, as it were, dictating a new kind of image altogether. Such was a nude in which a series of buzzing yellow banana shapes comprised the figure; or another in which contrasted orange and green areas gave a jungle brightness and a ferocity of ragged palm-leaf rhythms to the figure that was an altogether new experience.

Here the subject had compelled a new formal invention. These were neither the rhythms, colours, nor textures of the Hitchens millstream. Something exotic and fierce, something sensual as well as sensuous, had been stated. Whether in the Matisse-like slinkiness of certain of his reclining girls—where the colour was not at all like Matisse—or in the Renoir softness of a picture called *Summer Nude*, 1949 (and here the *design* was, of course, utterly remote from Renoir's), Hitchens was quite himself. And it was a new self.

Ivon Hitchens is certainly always extremely concerned to communicate *sensation*—the sensation he experiences when contemplating a particular landscape for instance: but at the same time he is equally concerned to build up a distinguished architecture of abstract forms. But these are by no means the usual forms of abstract art. I have already suggested that the rectilinear and the geometric are qualities entirely absent from his compositions: he has none of the hard edges of Cubism, either in the form of straight lines or of rigid arcs. The sort of abstraction he arrives at is organic in character, not mechanical. Hitchens is able, for instance, to give an architectural expression to purely sensuous elements. Light falling through leaves becomes an element which may itself be translated into an abstract, structural image. Thus an essentially calligraphic brush reduces the mass of a willow tree to an apparently flat plane of opaque yet vibrant scribbled olive green—a plane that is roughly oval in shape and is bitingly ragged at the edges. A further plane of colour, much darker and richer, and roughly oblong, might stand opposite this, linked to it by a single 'horizon' brushstroke, an inch wide, in black; this in turn might be supported by a second horizontal bar of colour, this time softer in texture than the black, and perhaps of a dull rust red. In this manner a calligraphy that is at once

austere and sensuous is built up: and it is *through* this calligraphy (Chinese in its delicacy) that we suddenly perceive the familiar stream or pool, lost, almost invisible, in the green shadow of the equally familiar willows, and with a bank of alders underlined by some bull-rushes. It is as though the intelligent but arid abstract calligraphy of a Hartung had suddenly been bestowed with deep meaning. In Hitchens the three-dimensional imagery of actual landscape goes hand in hand with a brilliant surface organization—a feat that is rare among contemporary painters (the Venetian landscape painter, Giuseppe Santomaso, or the Roman, Afro, are important exceptions).

PETER LANYON

With Hitchens one may, as I have indicated, couple a much younger painter, Peter Lanyon. His passion, too, is landscape. He, too, abstracts (from the rocks and emerald grass of Cornish headlands) an organic complex of images that eschews the rectilinear as decidedly as Hitchens's. But whereas Hitchens's conception of space is based upon the single perspective of the single, static viewpoint—the field of vision opening out in an expanding wedge to the horizon—Peter Lanyon embodies the visual evidence of numerous viewpoints (real or imaginary) in one unified complex of landscape forms. It is a most original procedure which holds great promise for this painter's future. Despite the influence of Gabo (who lived in Cornwall during the recent war) Lanyon has resisted the temptations of the non-figurative. For a painter in the middle thirties, like Lanyon, the non-figurative probably must be resisted; for one thing, it has already become one of the current forms of academicism in Paris and in America—North and South. In any case, Lanyon himself is emphatic about his own rejection of non-figuration.

If, on a warm October afternoon in 1949, one had happened to step out of Bond Street into the gallery where Peter Lanyon, a native inhabitant of St. Ives, was holding his first London exhibition, one would have felt one was exchanging the warm sunshine of the actual for the cold, grey-white light of an imaginary, almost a lunar, world. But this is only a way of putting it. Actually one recognized this white gleam of clear grey light which Lanyon's early near-abstract painting gives off—it is the light of St. Ives, of a peninsula seven-eighths surrounded by ocean, where the sky has a soft white radiance that must come from the reflection of light off the huge surrounding mirror of the Atlantic. You see the same grey-white light permeating the blue

shadows (since it comes from every direction simultaneously) of cottages or rocks in Christopher Wood: and it also informs the immaculate greys of Ben Nicholson's abstractions and landscapes. This Cornish phenomenon, this excess of white light, wonderfully enhances the very pale cement-washed cottage roofs of Cornwall, and, of course, the granite with its pale lichens: and then, dark green bushes or grass are darker and greener because of it.

Lanyon has been influenced not only by Gabo; but also by Adrian Stokes, Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth and Alfred Wallis: also, he seems to have paid attention to the drawing of Leonardo. One could not have pretended that, in 1949, he had fought his way out of all this: but what one could have said was that if he were not such a dogged 'original'—and despite the above list, Lanyon is most original—he would have found some compromise before then which would have permitted him a degree of fluency which, at that time, he still sometimes lacked. It is possible that those pale and streamlined images (beautifully painted: he is a very good craftsman) based in part on a subjective feeling for the bones of Cornwall—the form of its rocks, the contours of its hills—and in part on a more visual awareness of things, would have gained in coherence if Lanyon had concentrated less on structure and movement and more upon the actual *appearance* of solid objects—upon the play of light over surfaces. The subjective Gabo had left too deep a mark: Lanyon searched too often and too hard for the abstract archetype of the form of a hill or a rock; I could not help feeling at the time that his earlier paintings would have crystallized harder and clearer if he had more often been content to record the visual impact itself, the mere sensation, the mere appearance of his subject. As it was, a painting by Lanyon played a sort of hide-and-seek with visual reality. We recognized a headland, round and smooth at the top, sharper and more angular below, with the long horizon of the sea behind; and then the sweep of land towards a cove and another headland; the whole thing beautifully constructed in a horizontal panel about fifty inches long and twelve high. A pale composition of interweaving, taut, slim, sculptured forms. (I am thinking of a picture called *West Penwith* painted in 1949.) But instead of keeping up the conviction of an external landscape, Lanyon seemed to allow his images to dissolve here and there into something quite different—into an analogy of bone overlapped by tendons, perhaps. In itself there is nothing wrong in that: I am all for as many *formal* analogies being crowded in as are compatible with a fluent, clear design. But what I felt then about

Lanyon was that he was not always clear himself about these shifting analogies: the transition from wall-patterned fields streaked with outcrops of rock to muscle and bone (or whatever) was sometimes indeterminate. And this caused hesitations in the purely formal movement of the design—inconsistencies in the structure which resulted, in fact, in a slightly monotonous repetition of certain rhythms. Excessive subjectivity in painting is always characterized by a tendency to formal repetition and monotony. If Peter Lanyon, I thought, could cultivate sensation as well as imagination, he might give us something of exceptional interest; he had none of the modern French clichés—only a few outworn elliptical motifs from Gabo remained, here and there, among those earlier canvases.

Since 1949 Lanyon has greatly extended the expressive range and power of his art. If his earlier works were too bleached of strong colour, too exclusively white-grey-white (a feature deriving both from art and from nature: the pale, tasteful off-whites of Nicholson and the white radiance of the Cornish light), this has been corrected—indeed, reversed—in his work since 1950. Very strong grass greens, so hot and matt as almost to deny a sense of atmospheric space, abound; as do mysteriously heavy blacks, dirty khaki beiges and a kind of boiling white which looks very much like the froth blown off the crests of an angry sea. Pale blues—ceruleum and cobalt with white; little ultramarine: he uses the blues whose light is cold; there is not so much of the rich sunniness of ultramarine in his painting—also are present in almost every picture, emphasizing the cool lines of the rock-boned headlands. And again, where Lanyon's earlier pictures always had a too-sculptural aspect—as though they were illustrating the contents of a Constructivist sculptor's studio; not landscape, but isolated, smooth, concave, whitish forms of abstract sculpture seemed to be their subject —his recent work has become much more truly pictorial in its vision and treatment. He still *carves* his forms, slicing at them with a razor-blade (which removes a layer of paint from the canvas and provides him with a most expressive method of 'drawing' in terms of painted surfaces). But they are no longer those cold, isolate forms, which (representing the monolithic rocks of the Cornish moors or cliffs) stand apart from one another—and from the edges of the canvas, sky-surrounded. Nowadays the individual forms (and who can say whether a *particular* shape in a Lanyon is a field running vertically up the side of a crag; or a grey-green church tower; or a cliff-face emerging?) are

interwoven, interdependent, enjoying a formal intercourse in which all are equally involved. In other words, the picture surface is asserting itself, in the realm of composition: and, in that of *matière*, strong colour and a thickness of pigment are ousting the cold, whitish, smooth colour and texture of the earlier paintings. There is still a feeling of raggedness, incoherence here and there. But this in no way detracts from the vitality of Lanyon's recent landscapes. Frequently constructed inside the confines of an extremely thin, vertical canvas or board, these later paintings present an image—or, rather, each presents an extremely complex interwoven texture made out of numerous images—of the Cornish landscape that is unique and very affecting. Possibly not to know at first hand those tiny, complex, emerald, rock-bounded, rock-strewn fields of West Penwith (the final bulge at the tip of the peninsula) is to be at a disadvantage in reading these pictures. Yet I believe the paintings have a presence, a mysterious imagery which is the essence of that particular terrain. They are indeed *portraits of place*; they reveal nothing less than *the face of a landscape.*

I think one may claim that Lanyon always attempts to express a 'total experience' of landscape rather than a merely 'visual experience' of it. And this 'total experience' is his point of departure. As records of landscape *seen*, his tangled design simply does not read; representationally, that is. Nor will any amount of juggling with possible imagined viewpoints give the spectator the clue to such pictures. They are not aerial views combined with various multi-perspectival horizontal views, for instance. They are a pictorial equivalent of such purely visual data *combined with* much else. The experience they *suggest* is the total experience the body may have in walking over; climbing up into or down through; lying on, or sitting in—a rock infested, cave-rent, mine-ridden, road-or-path-threaded piece of Britain's Celtic seaboard.

The particular terrain involved is one of which I myself have intimate experience, since I spent five years of my childhood there, and have returned to it for vital refreshment on innumerable occasions. To find it, one must, from St. Ives, go still further—further west. One must crawl up, down, round and along that incredible last lap of coast, where the lonely road slips, folds and slides round rocks, under crags, past lonely huddles of granite farms, past the mines of the past, along the ledge of green fields, small and emerald, which hangs, more or less horizontal, above the savage cathedral cliffs but below the horizontally streamlined, rock-strewn, mine-and-fox-infested moors. Calligraphic

walls and banks (with gorse and foxglove, whitethorn and sloe jigging from their crests in the perpetual gale) draw abstract doodles across the intricate contours of the sloping land. Pale lichen-grey granite emerges everywhere through the skin of soil in horizontal layers, pontefract cakes of stone, parallel to the permanent horizon of the horizontal ocean which accompanies you always—on your right, filling your right eye—on this final push to the western limits of the land.

This then, is West Penwith; final knob of the long, westward-yearning peninsula of Cornwall. Stop anywhere on this road and climb to the rock-crowned crest of any hill—Trevalgan, Trendrine or Carn Galva—or halt in a church-crowned village—Zennor, Morvah, St. Just. You are in a world of viridian greens, of a multitude of greys, soft ceruleum blue, indigo, black, khaki, and Venetian red. A worn, asymmetric rectangle, a lopsided disc, an uneven triangle of smooth stone, inlaid in the field-path at your feet, are echoed precisely, it seems, in the boulders of the hedge by the stile, in the wall of the ancient church tower, in the configuration, half a mile away, of pale giant rocks balanced in an intricate chaos on the dark bracken slopes above you—amongst the badgers and the magpies. The same thrusting, asymmetric, blunt but streamlined forms recur again and again; throwing a net of calligraphic design over the entire scene; pulling the originally geometrically valid and upright church tower sideways, into accord with the rock-like cottages and the cottage-like rocks; proving a formal analogy between bush (wind clipped and lurching, straining towards the crag, and *away* from the tense curve of that Atlantic horizon-line) and hill, between the pattern the walls weave on the hill-side and the pattern that mica and quartz weave in the glistening, ubiquitous granite.

A charmed, pre-Christian, un-English atmosphere haunts the head-lands and the flat, small, gale-levelled hills. The stunted, stubborn, lichen-encrusted church towers stand on the skylines, signalling to each other, as outposts of Christian security in a sliding, pagan, Celtic landscape whose outlines flow, already, with the rhythm of the waves that surround it on very nearly every side.

3

SPACE IN CONTEMPORARY PAINTING AND ARCHITECTURE

WHAT time is to the musical composer, space is to the painter—and, I should have thought, to the architect too. Musical rhythm consists of intervals marked off and experienced in time: time is the medium. Pictorial rhythm consists of intervals registered in space: space is the medium. Until painting became non-figurative, the spatial configuration which the painter registered upon his canvas consisted of forms that could be read as illusionistic references to real objects; objects, that is, that were external to the picture. In achieving the precise spatial pattern, or configuration, which he desired, the painter had the illusion that he was pushing or pulling about real people, furniture, buildings or trees until he got them into the position, or 'composition', he found most pleasing and significant. With his mind focused upon these objects—or upon their forms—the painter may not have been consciously aware of their spatial significance; of their meaning as planes or surfaces which registered space. But he was always unconsciously aware of it. Indeed, the spatial connotation of the forms depicted in a representational painting is a prime source of its style or character: every important painter has created a fresh version of pictorial space. The same objects may be represented in the works of different masters: but their spatial relationships—to each other: to the picture-surface: to the frame—are always characteristic of, even unique to, their author.

If it is possible to argue—as I believe—that a major aim of the

painter is, and has always been, to organize space in a new and distinctive manner, we can say that the advent of non-figurative art has marked one important change in creative procedure. If the organization of space was an unconscious activity on the part of the representational painter—who was thinking of a subject while he organized his forms—in the case of the non-figurative painter it has become a conscious aim. For the non-figurative painter, space is the main object of manipulation: it is compressed or attenuated, massed or drawn out, according to the picture's needs. Thus, for the non-figurative painters, space itself has become the subject. It must be presented without the intrusion of specific images of real objects, for that would dilute the essence of space; would distract one, by associations, from the almost mystic contemplation of what is, after all, a prime element of the Universe.

These words apply more, in my view, to post-war than pre-war non-figurative painting, for reasons which I hope to explain later on. Before the war non-figurative painting was perhaps the only international movement which the French did not dominate. The French had produced Cubism—which is abstract but not non-figurative. And Cubism seems to have absorbed all those energies which, elsewhere, went into the purely non-figurative idioms, of Constructivism, and so on. But in 1945 pure non-figuration began to predominate in Paris, virtually for the first time. By 1950 it had become the key to what is pretty certainly the most important movement in French art since Cubism was founded. At first I mistook this new movement (which in fact comprises at least four distinct and separate groups, or categories, differing one from the next as clearly as Impressionism differed from Expressionism) for a final futile gesture from the cooling corpse of modern French art. I thought it represented nothing more than the arid recapitulation of themes familiar in pre-war non-figurative art. I was wrong. The painting of Singier, Manessier, Bazaine, Hartung, Schneider, Poliakoff or Estève was not merely the titivating decorative concoction which might result from simply restating the old non-figurative themes in paint which, instead of approaching the smooth, antiseptic banality of the bathroom wall (a typical pre-war quality), had much in common with Bonnard or the great Impressionists. Nor was the stronger, harsher, but nonetheless rich and expressive impasto of de Staël, of G. and B. van Velde or Soulages the result of an arbitrary marriage between an almost Expressionist 'texture' and, say, Mondrian. These artists of post-war fame stand at the beginning of a new develop-

ment in painting which may dominate the next decade or two. But before I describe the paintings of the most impressive artists in this new school of post-war non-figuration, English as well as French, and define the main differences between this and pre-war non-figurative painting, I should like to turn to architecture for a moment.

Lewis Mumford, in an article in *The New Yorker* in which he was comparing Lever House and the new United Nations Secretariat building, both in New York, wrote as follows:

> 'Lever House lacks the massive sculptural qualities of Wright's inspired masonry (The Larkin Building); it is, rather, in its proud transparency, "a construction in space". It says all that can be said, delicately, accurately, elegantly, with surfaces of glass, with ribs of steel, with an occasional contrast in slabs of marble or in beds of growing plants, but its special virtues are most visible, not in the envelope, but in the interior that this envelope brings into existence, in which light and space and colour constitute both form and decoration.'

It is in these last phrases about 'the interior' which 'the envelope brings into existence' that Mr. Mumford touches on what seems to me to be the most important development in architecture in recent times—the development of a new, and unique, spatial sense. I am an amateur as a critic of architecture: I cannot pretend to trace this development. But, looking recently at photographs of buildings by Mies van der Rohe[1] I was struck, in the first place, by what *looked* to me (and photographs are very deceptive) to be an austerity which amounted to harshness, by an openness and simplicity which amounted to bleakness. It seemed to me that every 'architectural' feature—every solid wall, or screen, vertical or horizontal—was, as it were, too self-effacing, to the point of attempting to become non-existent in terms of an actual plastic solid and remaining merely as a defining boundary in the mind of the spectator. Detail became, very early on in Mies van der Rohe, nothing more specifically articulated than the textural quality of the materials used—the tiny bubbles of concrete, the vein of marble, the gleam of glass. What, I asked myself, was the aesthetic significance of these perfectly proportioned but self-effacing, neutral screens, which interpenetrated, overlapped or, standing free, merely echoed one another in their harmonious definition of space? I came to the conclusion that their

[1] See Plate 14.

bare rectilinear interpenetration, their faceless anonymity as 'walls', their imageless austerity, was due to one thing: they were self-effacing because they defined not a solid framework—whose separate formal members must possess that quality of image and personality which these clearly denied—but a configuration of space. And I say *of* space; not *in* space: for space itself was the medium. Space was the entity—the visible 'building' was merely its visible boundaries. Space itself was the harmonious organic form which the architect articulated by means of his screens, ceilings and floors. Modelling this invisible image of spatial volumes Mies van der Rohe was constrained to render its frontiers—at least—visible. And this he therefore accomplished with the minimum of visible material. The progression in his career which is most notable is, surely, this progression from visible to invisible. The inescapably solid screens remained solid: but they became increasingly transparent; until in the Farnsworth house the walls were all of glass.

Other great modern architects have become increasingly aware of space in this way—as if space was a block of stone and the architect a sculptor. But Mies van der Rohe seems to me either to be more attached to the spatial element itself; or to have less interest in materials for their own intrinsic quality. Wright's spatial structure is as adventurous as Mies's: but Wright loves the inherent personality of his solids: the glassiness of glass, the sandy sunburnt density of stone, the pale water-flowing rhythm of wood-grain, for instance. Where Mies spreads these materials thin and taut, to *define*, simply; Wright spreads them thick, lavishly, *adorning* the spatial definitions which he is also communicating to us at the same instant.

There is almost a parallel contrast in sculpture. Consider Naum Gabo's 'constructions in space' (and is he not the originator of this phrase? Surely Gabo's influence on the architects will have to be acknowledged as a very far-reaching one?) beside those of Reg Butler. Gabo's airy, open, transparent constructions in Perspex brilliantly pursue the definition of a concept in terms of space, and space only. He would like to project his image directly into the spectator's mind without having to make any concessions to a physical material of any sort. He wishes the material out of the way: the mental concept is all that matters; so he chooses the most neutral, most nearly non-existent material to hand—an almost invisible plastic, as devoid of quality or personality as any material could be. The sensuous pleasure in the means, in the medium used, which other artists so much enjoy, Gabo

eschews. But this renunciation is, and always was, a renunciation of conscious choice. Gabo is one of the few artists of genius alive to-day. He does nothing by accident. He has explained his rejection of 'personality' as an active criterion, in a profound and brilliant essay, *On Constructive Realism*, published in 1949.

Reg Butler, on the other hand, traces his cage-like figures in iron and steel with the utmost enjoyment in the process: the molten steel drips, is hammered, ground away, added to by welding, sliced about with an oxygen torch—and so on, until the metal itself bears the imprint of the sculptor's will, registers his personal touch as intimately as clay or wax does in responding to the pressure of the modeller's thumb. Butler is not concerned merely to project an idea, or draw an image in space. He is also preoccupied with the potential expressiveness of iron and steel: his aim is, also, to make iron flower; to make it come alive. There is a danger that the modern architect will follow Gabo rather than Butler in this particular respect. Certainly space must be considered almost as if it were a living, organic substance, whose special nature must be respected. But it is possible at the same time to use materials—for the purpose of defining space—which possess more rather than less intrinsic personality. A spatial concept is not inescapably bound up with colourless, transparent synthetic substances like Perspex. Good building should reconcile the nature of space and the nature of solid material.

Not that Naum Gabo confines himself to 'synthetic substances like Perspex'—although it is understandable that we should still tend to identify his constructions with this kind of material, because he was possibly the first sculptor to employ plastics and he has certainly used them extensively. But in a late Gabo masterpiece like the construction over the staircase at the Baltimore Museum of Art, a 'stabile' designed to be read by eyes which are ascending the stairs below, and which 'moves' only in the vision of the viewer, the list of natural materials used includes anodized aluminium, gold wire and copper, amongst others. Looked at purely as contrasted colours and textures, the Baltimore construction is exquisitely rich. The dark mussel blue of the anodized aluminium framework floats against a soft apricot ceiling; brilliant 'chords' of yellow light are emitted by the gold wires as they sieve the light; the mellow ochres of the occasional copper planes reverberate amongst the icy whitish-blue gleams that come off the transparent plastic here and there. The whole amazing image is vibrant with life. At last, I felt, the sensuous elements of colour and texture

had been incorporated in the previously too austere but nonetheless brilliant constructions of this astonishing artist. Gabo is supreme, in my view, among non-figurative artists for his penetration, or understanding, of space. No one else has trapped the essence of space with works of such subtlety, logic, forcefulness and beauty.

The question of the nature of material (and 'respect for material', though a commonly accepted principle now, is nonetheless one of permanent importance) brings me back to the contemporary non-figurative painters I want to discuss, because if there is one thing more than another which distinguishes post-war from pre-war non-figurative painting it is that the post-war painters use oil paint as it should always be used, making the most of its rich textures, while the pre-war non-figurative artists denied this, using paint as if it were coloured glass or smooth enamel. If such a statement as this seems to betray a personal bias on my part—a mere preference for thick rather than thin paint—I will put it another way. Post-war non-figurative painting makes its point through the medium of a free movement of brush or knife: this is the essential quality of painterly 'scribble' common to Rembrandt and Velasquez; Michelangelo and Rubens; Titian and Piero della Francesca; Cézanne and Delacroix. Pre-war non-figurative painting postulated such a degree of impersonal detachment as necessarily involved unrhythmic brushwork—which appeared to wish to deny its own nature *as* brushwork. The smooth, cold, clear, hard surfaces of Mondrian, Nicholson, Hélion, Tauber-Arp, Miró and Kandinsky (these last two cannot of course qualify as purely non-figurative painters since each is concerned to create ideographic symbols; but they subscribed to the common aesthetic of the period, which is what I am here defining) were, moreover, a factor operating against the realization of a sense of space. All these artists did their best to eliminate from their surfaces what I will call the vibration of space. A surface of mechanical smoothness suppresses the illusionistic power of a painted surface. Constructivist painting aimed at these two qualities: smoothness, and the absence of any illusionistic reference to any reality other than the picture-surface itself. The very criterion of excellence for such painters as Nicholson or Mondrian was the absence of the representational function in a painting: it should be so completely suppressed that a picture could only be contemplated as an end in itself, an object in its own right.

This ideal reduces painting to the condition of bas-relief—a logic Nicholson followed out. It denies, however, the most basic function of

pictorial art—which is its ability to *represent* a reality beyond itself: the illusionistic operation of any image recorded on a flat surface is painting's inherent magic, its unique power. This quality of illusion—of the sensation of a spatial configuration existing behind (and occasionally in front of) the surface of the picture—is inseparable from the sense of space (itself illusory, in painting: though in sculpture it is actual). The merest scratch of a line on a white surface induces sensations of recession—of an imagined form advancing out of or falling back through the place where the marked white surface stands. Thus space is the 'medium' in terms of which any pictorial configuration has its being.

A further very important distinction, therefore, between, say, Mondrian and Soulages[1] is that the post-war painter acknowledges this spatial necessity in painting whereas the pre-war artist attempted to deny it. There is an immensely powerful plastic awareness evident in both Soulages and de Staël.[2] They are not only expressing a sense of space, sensuous even tangible space; they are expressing forms in space—even though we are not made conscious of the actual identity of those forms. They have all along conformed to the principle that painting is illusionistic, representational: we sense their forms, their organized spatial volumes, as being something *beyond* the canvas, with its thick encrustations of pigment. Possibly the reason why this new French non-figuration, now it has arrived, is so much more convincing, as painting, than the earlier idiom I've discussed, is that these painters have been unable to forget the lessons of Cubism. Cubism is the exact contrary of that idealistic art-form—Constructivism—which divorces vision from means: the example of Gabo's would-be mental designs has been given; but Mondrian, also, cannot be said to have *loved* paint. Cubism, in its love of the concrete, extols paint, canvas, paper, chalk as well as wine-glasses, tables and guitars. This sensuous love of the material is of paramount importance to Soulages, de Staël and—over here in England—to William Scott, Alan Davie, Roger Hilton, Peter Lanyon (whom I include here despite his figurative images—they are sometimes oblique in their references to his experience of natural objects), Victor Pasmore and Terry Frost.

We might call the present moment (January 1953) the period of 'thick'—as opposed to 'thin'—non-figuration. Not only do these contemporaries use thicker paint—arriving at the quality of grain in

[1] See Plate 12.

[2] See Plate 13.

their surfaces which produces that 'vibration of space' which is also a vibration of light, of course—than the pre-war Constructivists: but their works have a stronger rhythm, a weightier mass, a more insistent pulse. Where the pre-war painters were geometric, sharp, over-tidy, the post-war are organic, blunt, ragged. Pre-war non-figuration was dominated by mathematical precision in execution and a highly conceptual mode of invention. Post-war non-figuration derives its much freer configurations from sensory sources and states them in terms which assail us by their sensuous vigour and their intuitive free strength; perceptual rather than conceptual in their mode of expression. A painting in black and white by Mondrian is a sign which may be read: the excitement is in the meaning and the meaning is beyond the painting which remains neutral, as an object; the mere passive vehicle of an idea. A painting in black and white by William Scott[1] (basically, the rectilinear structure is not far removed from a Mondrian) is not a map or graph or symbol: it is not merely a means of communicating to us something other than itself: it is not, like a Mondrian, an essay on form or proportion. It is a living entity; utterly organic, and therefore unique. It is itself a concrete sensuous fact, involving paint. It creates space directly from its own surfaces, not so much by any reference to extraneous objects, as by a reference to space itself. Space is the object it portrays—though admittedly it gives space the momentary semblance of a spiky piece of furniture!

In painting, I have suggested, space and form are not actual, as they are in sculpture, but illusory. Painting, indeed, is essentially an art of illusion; and 'pictorial science' is simply that accumulated knowledge which enables the painter to control this illusion, the illusion of forms in space. But the secret of good painting—of whatever age or school, I am tempted to say—lies in its adjustment of an inescapable dualism: on the one hand there is the illusion, indeed the *sensation*, of depth; and on the other there is the physical reality of the flat picture-surface. Good painting creates an experience which *contains* both. It creates a sensation of voluminous spatial reality which is so intimately bound up with the flatness of the design at the surface that it may be said to exist only in terms of such pictorial flatness. The true and proper care of the painted surface of the canvas not only fashions that canvas well—as an object in its own right—but also destroys it. Thus, contemplation of the 'empty' grey flatnesses in a painting by William Scott or Roger

[1] See Plate 36.

Hilton[1]—to return to British contemporaries—yields a twofold experience at one and the same instant: one enjoys the opaque, gritty, scratched, uneven greyness or redness or blueness of the pigment as an object, as a fashioned entity, possessing a life of its own (like the life in a granite surface; or the surface of tarred planks which is a boat's hull); but, also, one's eye passes through and beyond this painted surface, the separate shapes dovetailed together, and finds that illusion of a spatial configuration which, I maintain, is a permanently vital feature of pictorial art.

The eye *sinks* through the surface. And at this moment all the flat segments of the design at that surface take on their second meaning, which lies in their illusory power to appear as forms in space. Some of these segments, in a 'non-figurative' picture like a Scott or Hilton or Pasmore,[2] have the function of acting as solid bodies (or facets of such) in the illusory three-dimensional world of the picture; others take on the significance of the spaces between such solids. The good painter is always as much concerned with the 'spaces between' his represented objects as with those objects themselves. He is never concerned with the sculptural form of those objects considered in isolation. Thus he is not concerned first and foremost with either a solid form or with the interval between two such forms. He is concerned with the total configuration of all his ingredients all the time. Emphasis is always evenly distributed. And this is true whatever the degree of abstraction or representation the good painter happens to employ.

In July 1953 I arranged an exhibition at the Hanover Gallery to try to illustrate from the work of ten contemporary British painters, including myself, much of what I am arguing here. 'Space in Colour' was the title of the exhibition. Now some of the painters included in this exhibition *abstract* their material from the visual scene (Hitchens,[3] Vaughan,[4] William Johnstone, Lanyon[5] or myself): others *construct* with non-figurative units (Roger Hilton, Pasmore, Terry Frost). The first are abstract painters (like Cézanne, Picasso or Braque); the second are non-figurative painters—while William Scott and Alan Davie[6] alternate, sometimes within the same canvas, between the two modes. But

[1] See Plate 30.
[2] See Plate 28.
[3] See Plates 9 and 15.
[4] See Plate 32.
[5] See Plate 10.
[6] See Plate 39.

all arrive at their own species of illusory space: spatial cohesiveness characterizes the work of them all. The former retain the recognizable scene in varying degrees of verisimilitude. Hitchens or Vaughan disturb natural configuration very little; Johnstone, too, though in his case each form, while still in its place, realistically speaking, has been stripped of realistic texture and modelling and is thus harder to read, in terms of the original subject. Johnstone is so interested in the architecture of natural landscape forms that he minimizes their texture, he excludes their sensuous quality—he does not attempt, as Hitchens always does, to unite the sensuous texture of landscape with his sense of its underlying architecture. With Johnstone, 'the sensuous' is an element reserved not for his subject but for his picture itself. His paint is sensuous, his image architectural. With Hitchens, on the other hand, architecture and sensuous beauty of texture *in the subject* are both stated in each gesture. For him, the sensuous—light through leaves—is itself become an element that he can handle architecturally. Lanyon also, though essentially concerned with the actual experience of his landscape subject-matter—both as a visual and a tactile reality, does present us with something abstracted (from 'nature') rather than something constructed (out of his head—or his body, as non-figurative constructivists quite credibly may claim). But Lanyon's landscapes do not have, as Hitchens's do, for instance, a single viewpoint as their basic vision. Hitchens sees all his material from a single fixed viewpoint, though he may swivel round, admittedly, to look down more than one vista through the semi-transparent screens of his woodland foliage. Lanyon's Cornish landscape is not a matter of tree-screens, ranged one behind another in depth, as Hitchens's is: rather it is a treeless, rock-strewn terrain, so bony and sculptural as to defeat the painter observing the requirements I have defined unless—unless he chops it up arbitrarily. This Lanyon does: though there is nothing 'arbitrary' in that coalescing of a number of viewpoints, including aerial ones, which results in such organic unities of vision as he not infrequently achieves.

But now to the second half of my thesis: colour. Colour is the utterly indispensable means for realizing the various species of pictorial space. Mere perspectival drawing, mere chiaroscuro of monochromatic tone —these may render illusionist verisimilitude of reality: but it is a dead version; they cannot produce that fully created thing, found nowhere else, not even in photographs, which I call pictorial space. The imaginative, intuitive re-creation of form which, for years, I have been trying

to pin down in a definition is only conceivable in terms of a vibrant picture surface. And this vibration is colour. Pictorial space, I have suggested, is an illusion of depth *behind* the actual canvas. It may also be a projection—of plane or mass—apparently in front of the canvas. But the existence of pictorial space implies the partial obliteration of the canvas's surface from our consciousness. This is the rôle of colour: to push back or bring forward the required section of the design. The advance or recession of different colours in juxtaposition is a physical property of colour: it is a physical impossibility to paint shapes on a surface, using different colours in a variety of tones, and avoid the illusion of the recession of parts of that surface. Colour is therefore as powerful an agent of spatial expression as drawing. Indeed, one 'draws' with flat washes of colour, as often as not, and not with line at all. Tonal colour is thus the sole means of bestowing that physical vibrancy and resonance without which no picture is alive. And this vibration can be conveyed in 'hueless colours'—that is in blacks, whites and greys—no less than by the full, chromatic range. Hence my inclusion in that exhibition of Pasmore's 'colourless' photostats, which are full of colour resonance and drama, and of a number of drawings.

Because my criteria had been those of spatial colour the artists included in that exhibition were linked by their common possession of the qualities I have tried to describe here—and not by mere stylistic affinities. Indeed, it was obvious that the current stylistic categories cut through and across that list of ten painters. Some of them would be called 'abstract' by the majority of gallery-goers (and the battle for this word's true meaning has been lost: it is no longer considered as a verb, and one applicable to Cézanne's processes; but as an adjective meaning 'non-figurative') and others would be called 'representational'. In fact, many people tend to reserve the word 'abstract' for that painting which they are on the verge of understanding more fully. To describe works with which one has become really familiar, even when these are non-figurative, one often attempts to find an alternative label to 'abstract'. Being aware of the true content and feeling of a work—even, as I say, of a patently non-figurative one—makes one reluctant to label it with a word which implies, although it ought not to, a certain barren emptiness. The debate about abstract art, however, has already become a barren and empty discussion. We need new words for expressing what we value most deeply in painting. Since I have never admired a picture yet which did not, as it were, give off a sensation of space (and I have only touched the fringe of the subject:

there are scores of varieties of pictorial space), I must for the present consider *space in colour* to be as useful a criterion as any other. Spatial colour is, however, a grammar: the language of space in colour can doubtless be made to express anything that stirs in the consciousness of man.

4

SUBMERGED RHYTHM

A Potter's Aesthetic

POTTERY is an ancient form of non-figurative art. In the introduction to his book, *A Potter's Portfolio*, Bernard Leach wrote of the wet, newly thrown pot, where 'every movement hangs like frozen music'; where 'volumes, open spaces and outlines are parts of a living whole; they are thoughts, controlled forces in counterpoise of rhythm. A single intuitive pressure on the spinning wet clay, and the whole pot comes to life; a false touch and the expression is lost.' And this criterion, 'life', which he announced more than once in that essay, is the right one, though a volume might be devoted to its elucidation as it applies to pottery. Yet, in his mere choice of the sixty illustrations which went to make up his *Portfolio*, Leach did more to help us towards such an elucidation than many an essay might have accomplished. For instance, he there defined, by his selection, his own ceramic aesthetic. That aesthetic ignores much—Delft, Majolica: much Greek, Persian and German, for instance. What it embraces I shall discuss in a moment; meanwhile, it is worth noticing that Leach believed at the time that his *Portfolio* was the first published ceramic anthology to be selected on purely aesthetic grounds.

I remember thinking how triumphantly the result vindicated the method. There was not a dull or freakish specimen—still less an ugly one—in the whole book. A critic, historian or other expert would almost inevitably have included a number of unsatisfying pots, for two reasons: his selection would have been more 'objective', and he would

not be in possession of an instinct as sure as that of the most important English potter living. But this was unmistakably an artist's book—and Bernard Leach is a very subtle artist. What is more, he has proved an immensely influential one. The extent to which the movement of artist-potters has expanded in this country since the war—when it very nearly succumbed, for obvious reasons—is not generally realized; and who would guess that in the United States these same artist-potters now number 70,000, to quote Bernard Leach? It presents us with a sociological-aesthetic phenomenon of great significance, this latter-day revival of the Arts and Crafts movement in the sphere of pottery. Bernard Leach stands in very much the same relation to all these contemporary hand-potters that William Morris stood to another generation of artist-craftsmen.

If the word *potter* still connotes that pot-making activity in which a solid, horizontal wheel and one's bare hands are the chief instruments for moulding the clay mixture, I suppose there are three kinds of potter in England to-day. First of all there are the remnants of the traditional hand-potters, in a few rural potteries, who still make earthenware pots, styled 'rustic', perhaps, where the invading standards of mass-production have engendered self-consciousness. Then there are the few skilled artisans remaining in the great factories of the Midlands, men who are still required to throw and turn, but whose hands are only substitutes for machines, in the sense that their only concern is the precise and rapid execution of the designs of others. And, thirdly, there are the artist-potters—craftsmen of sensibility and education who (and they are less precious than the newly coined phrase might suggest) are responsible for the only modern pottery which in any way approaches the best work of antiquity. To call this class more educated is only to imply that its members are more conscious of the nature of their activity than either the village potters, with their failing grip on any tradition, or the factory potters, with their merely obedient skills. Without what can only be called the conscious desire of the creative artist animating each recruit, the contemporary artist-potter would simply not exist: no 'economic vacuum' has been responsible for their arrival on the scene. In fact, it is only after years of pioneer effort that a complementary desire for their products is coming to consciousness in a wide public.

It should not be thought, however, that an artist-potter restricts himself to pots with a function that is mainly aesthetic. Usually he

makes the whole range of domestic pottery from stewpots to salt-cellars—at least, he does if he follows the example of Bernard Leach. Others—most notably Staite Murray—hardly depart from decorative 'individual', or 'studio' pots which sell at high prices—jars, bottles and bowls. But Leach, who spent twelve years learning his craft from the Japanese, has always made every kind of pot: and if we begin to sense a philosophy in his general practice we shall not be mistaken; indeed Leach's supreme influence with our artist-potters is partly due to his instinctive belief that in pottery physical function and beauty (aesthetic function) are only different aspects of a single entity—namely, the good pot. Of course, this attitude must own its descent, philosophically, from Ruskin and William Morris; and if Bernard Leach is the chief figure in a contemporary movement of artist-potters, this movement is generally informed by two principles—whether or not they are held consciously is not the point. Briefly, the first of them implies that everything made by hand for use can have an essential comeliness regardless of particular talent or inspiration: and the second, that the making of these good-looking things, admittedly slow and not without its tedium, can in itself constitute something very substantial and satisfying, something not less valuable than 'a way of life'. Against the background of the present chaos in the social texture this is more than ever a factor of unique value and one which certainly compensates for the limitations of quantity and profit inevitably attendant upon hand processes; limitations, of course, in which social planners all too readily see conclusive arguments against their 'useful' continuance into the future. Of all this Leach has long been aware, and the Leach Pottery at St. Ives, Cornwall, is a working example of much that is here implied.

From time to time an exhibition of 'Leach Pottery' is held in London. In these exhibitions Leach and the Leach Pottery must be distinguished, in so far as that is possible. They are primarily, of course, exhibitions of Leach's individual work—pots which he has designed and executed—if he hasn't actually designed them *while* executing them —and he may never consciously repeat them. The shapes possible to pottery are limited; and though Leach may move, in a cycle covering years, through a pretty large repertory of forms, he is guided solely by an instinctive desire to refine first one and then another of his shapes; and versions of an identical pot, which are separated by years, will have similarities and dissimilarities of the subtlest interest. Almost all his forms have their prototypes, however, in traditional work in Japan,

Korea, in mediaeval English earthenware or in English slipware. One may particularly remark this English derivation of much of his work: most of his jugs, for instance, are thoroughly English. But the Oriental inspiration is perhaps—to an *English* audience—the more obvious; it has even been disparaged at times as an 'import' that cannot be expected to agree with our indigenous styles. But at the time Leach went to Japan for inspiration—about 1908—there were no lively indigenous styles; nothing was being practised here that might have gained his artistic allegiance. In Japan he did find a traditional activity of exceptional vitality. In any case, what matters is that what he found, and made his own, and what for more than thirty years, since his return to England, to St. Ives, he has been, as it were, transmitting to an English audience—this is artistically valid: and had to be, to inspire a whole generation of English craftsmen, an effect one cannot imagine a similar stimulus producing in France or Italy, for instance. If that influence is less visible to-day, as a direct stylistic influence (in such excellent potters as Lucie Rie, for instance), than it was five or six years ago, that is only a further proof of its extensive effect. Leach's activity has successfully transmitted many values besides that of his personal style; and these have taken root in a very wide field. The present revolt against his 'style', evident in the work of many of our younger potters since 1950, is simply that—a revolt against Leach's 'style'. The chief values of Leach's 'revolution' still apply. In fact, if they did not overwhelmingly prevail, in the contemporary scene, there would be precious little 'hand pottery' in existence to register this stylistic change. It remains to be seen whether such sensitive artists as James Tower will follow Picasso so far that they jettison completely all those exclusively *ceramic* virtues which Leach rescued from tradition—making them live again—but of which Picasso is purely oblivious.

Perhaps the self-dedication of young art students (ex-Servicemen, often) to an impecunious existence as craftsmen is sometimes regarded as an event of greater sociological than aesthetic interest. Even if their pots were bad, their choice of occupation—their chosen 'way of life'—would read as a gesture of protest against the present quality of life accorded us by our contemporary technocratic civilization. It is always the main danger of this movement that the social protest may annul the creative artistry: the craft may preclude the art. This, however, was never a threat in the case of Bernard Leach. By 1920, when he returned to England, he had, as an artist, *become* Oriental. I mean that he had succeeded in truly *identifying* himself with an Oriental culture; he

could instinctively and superbly re-create pot shapes long ago evolved by Eastern tradition. And these personal versions were not 'copies' in the derogatory sense; rather they were living equivalents of the Oriental originals; variations on a theme. A Sung stoneware jar, a Korean (twelfth-century) celadon bowl, a Japanese (seventeenth-century) stoneware vase are all—amongst many other examples—recognizable in translation as they recur in Bernard Leach's repertoire of forms during the past thirty years. Nor does this imply lack of originality, because in pottery, as I have suggested, there only are a limited number of thrown forms possible, and all have already been discovered at one period or another. In the art of pottery originality, therefore, lies in subtleties.

However, there is no doubt that what principally cheats the critic of his chance to accuse Leach of trading in a foreign aesthetic to the neglect of the indigenous values embodied in our own ceramic traditions is the fact that mediaeval English pottery and English slipware have just as great a place, as influences, in the amalgam which is Leach's own style, as has Far Eastern pottery of select periods. What is demonstrated by Leach and his many followers (including his former pupil, Michael Cardew) is a certain identity in the *blunt, full* rhythms of English slipware and those of the Far Eastern pottery by which he was most attracted. Incidentally, American Indian pottery is his latest enthusiasm, as his *A Potter's Portfolio* reveals. To quote again from what he writes there: 'The high classics of 1900 are not those of 1951' (thanks, in good measure, to Leach himself). 'Our eyes still turn to China, but of the seventh to twelfth centuries and not of the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries.' Chinese Sung pottery was what Leach felt most drawn towards. Now, Sung pots are characterized by certain massive, blunt rhythms which seem buried just below the surface of a pot. This submerged rhythm, which pulses *within* a Sung (or a Leach) pot, is quite incompatible with the sharp outlines and intricate ornamental detail (in the form often of additions to the main body of a vessel) which typifies the later Chinese periods that Leach rejects. The Sung pot is dominated by an interior thrust; its outline ripples, is mobile. The later Chinese pot (or one from Wedgwood, for that matter) is articulated *at* the surface; it is precise, cold and static in outline; it has no interior warmth, no invisible thrust. And its more sophisticated form is refined almost to a mechanical 'perfection'.

Leach, then, has done two things. He has demonstrated the aesthetic parallel existing between Sung and mediaeval English pottery—thus

creating a genuine East-West synthesis; and, in doing this, he has given us a ceramic idiom very much in accord with aspects of modern art. One can compare him to Henry Moore in some ways: both by-passed the Renaissance. And in so far as either has drawn on English sources, those sources are mediaeval. Also, Leach emphasizes the generous pulse of the total, blunt form of a pot, the form *underlying* its mere appearance. Moore, it seems to me, does an equivalent thing in sculpture. Even Moore's canon, 'truth to material', is wholly applicable to Leach —and I shall return to this point later. Finally, like Moore, Bernard Leach is very conscious of the nature of form in space. He writes: 'A potter on his wheel is doing two things at the same time: he is making hollow wares . . . *and he is exploring space*' (my italics). This defines that dual responsibility which embraces craft and art at once. It sums up a most sound and ancient tradition.

Staite Murray is the only other English potter of equal fame to-day, and although I would ascribe to him a lesser influence than that of Bernard Leach, he is in some respects a more *original* artist, which is not to call him a *better* one. His forms, unlike Leach's, are rigid and suggest sculpture: they have a hardness of outline that also suggests stone. Leach, by comparison, is comfortable, rounded to the touch, homely. While Murray may suggest the phrase 'formal exercise', Leach can be described as 'lyrical': a rippling, slightly asymmetric outline gives to his pots the quality of life. The best of them will seem to breathe, almost:

> *. . . as a Chinese jar still*
> *Moves perpetually in its stillness*

so subtle will be the interaction of contour upon changing contour. I suppose I like best those pots to which specific use attaches: I remember Leach exclaiming once, at St. Ives, that the inside curves of a jampot 'should be an invitation to a spoon!'

I have often wondered to what extent I have myself been influenced, as a painter, by the fourteen months I spent at the Leach Pottery at St. Ives in 1944 and 1945. Until fairly recently the idiom which I made my own was the idiom of still life: that is to say, the sort of spatial organization which I most habitually constructed in my canvases was an organization involving the limited spatial sequences typical of still-life painting. It is possible to argue that all painters are *primarily* concerned with the definition of space: it is possible to believe that all painters—

whether they are representational or abstract ('non-figurative', as I prefer to say)—are all more vitally concerned with giving concrete, tangible reality to certain abstract rhythms, certain patterns or formal configurations, than to specific, individual forms. To continue, this would be to argue that the actual single forms which a painter uses to create that characteristic rhythm of spatial definition which is tyical of his work (which, indeed, *is* his work); that the individual forms he uses are of less significance, considered separately, than the total configuration in which they are set. In the final analysis, of course, it is impossible to separate the two. Individual forms in a canvas are not *individual*: they have already suffered a transformation as the result, simply, of various kinds of pressure which the total composition, the total design, inflicts upon all its components. Incidentally, this is one major cause of what is popularly known as *distortion* in figurative painting. A pictorial image of, say, a candlestick may lurch to the left at its base, to the right at its middle, and to the left again at the top. All this may be attributable to the various horizontal thrusts exerted upon the vertical candlestick by adjacent objects or forms in the composition. However, what I am trying to lead up to at this point is not some conclusions on the nature of space-relationships in modern painting. I am hoping to suggest certain parallels which exist between contemporary pictorial and ceramic aesthetic. In my own early post-war pictures—if I may continue to refer to my own experience—there appeared a number of still-life objects amongst which were some jugs, coffee-pots and vases. These pots looked remarkably like Leach pots. They also bore some resemblance to jugs in pictures by Braque. Critics of my paintings have been very conscious of this second influence—but not, I think of the first. Nor have I ever heard anyone speak of the extraordinary similarity which exists between the actual jugs of Bernard Leach and the pictorial jug-image which Braque has slowly evolved since about 1924, and which, in a famous picture painted in 1942, *The Washstand*, was almost identical with the waisted stoneware 'lemonade jug' which still features in the Leach Pottery's present catalogue.

But this example of an actual and a pictorial pottery sharing many of the same qualities does not point to a simple case of direct influence—at any rate where Leach and Braque are concerned. Leach's significance is not merely that of an individual artist: he is typical of a whole contemporary movement. Braque, on the other hand—though so personal a painter that his direct artistic descendants are a mere

handful—Braque is one of the great pioneers of modern painting. Potter and painter, each in his own sphere, has created, or released, a new rhythm. Perhaps that sounds simple or easy. Let me say, then, that I do not believe any achievement in the visual arts to be greater than this. One may 'think up' a new subject for painting; one may concoct a new formal synthesis out of familiar components; or one may replace identifiable forms by unidentifiable ones (that is all that a good abstract painter has done—he has stripped his forms of their recognizable, identifiable 'faces' and presented them in a faceless guise: what a bad abstract painter does—and there are thousands of them about now—does not concern us). But what one cannot do, without drawing on the deepest and most unexpected resources of human feeling or consciousness, is to create a rhythm which is a *new* rhythm. I am not claiming that Leach or Hamada or Cardew or Staite Murray is comparable, as an aesthetic innovator, to Braque. What I do claim is that these potters have re-established an ancient formal rhythm which precisely coincides with the formal rhythm of certain modern painters; and notably those of Braque. Now rhythm cannot be pinpointed. It pervades a picture or a pot, dominating its forms, dictating its character and above all, determining its intervals. Rhythm in painting is that logical force which suddenly gives the subject—whether still-life, landscape or figure—its new identity as a pictorial (as distinct from a photographically 'real') image. On the one hand, the artist may be in love with his subject and want to paint it. And, on the other, he may only have at his disposal certain habitual, if not exactly mechanical, rhythms; certain reflexes of eye, arm and hand; certain rhythmic gestures of the brush. While this is his condition, the sort of marks he makes on his canvas will be one thing and the sort of picture he is trying to paint will be quite another. This state of affairs will persist unless, and until, that sudden experience arises in which he surprises himself by seeing, for the first time, a new rhythmical statement (in terms of his medium) which *embodies* his beloved subject-matter. Personally I believe that we shall not be deluding ourselves if we insist on the *physical* nature of this whole experience. As a painter, I can testify to the following sequence of sensations: the sudden apprehension of the form of a new picture is first registered, in my own case at any rate, as a distinct feeling of hollowness: and to locate this sensation somewhere in the region of the diaphragm is not to indulge in a pretentious whim: it is merely to acknowledge physical fact. I am noting possible subjects all day long, every day, quite involuntarily.

Thus it is not a question of painting when I see a subject: it is a question of calling up a subject (or to be more precise of calling up an immense variety of remembered subjects simultaneously) when I am ready for action with my brush and palette. So I begin with this hollow feeling. Next, this uncomfortable sensation in one's middle grows into a sort of palpitation, which, in turn, seems rapidly to spread upwards and outwards until the muscles of one's right arm (if one is right-handed!) become agitated by a flow of electric energy. This energy in one's arm is the prelude to painting because it can only be released by grabbing a brush and starting to paint.

This means allowing one's arm and hand free rein to weave upon the canvas a complex of forms which will, as likely as not, be decidedly problematical and surprising to oneself. Conscious thought about design or form or structure simply does not enter into it at this stage. One's arm has been given its freedom and it discharges its twitching energy upon the unfortunate, passive canvas: one's conscious mind, at such a moment, is probably doing no more than observe the swiftly changing tangle on that canvas. What time it can spare from doing this is taken up in contemplating—not design—but the subject of the picture. When I work I am thinking of one thing, but *feeling* and *doing* something else. My mind, when I am painting, is completely engrossed —not by the painting itself but by something *beyond* my painting: something I will call the subject, though I do not mean that in quite the ordinary sense of the term. I might be in London, and the subject of my picture might be a room in St. Ives, Cornwall. It is a room with a view: a room with a huge window overlooking the harbour; and beyond the harbour, the bay; and beyond the bay—infinity (plus an island with a lighthouse). Now while I work away, there in London, I cannot *think*—with my conscious mind—of anything but my St. Ives room, with its window. While I paint I am *in* St. Ives. Meanwhile, however, the picture is being constructed very rapidly by my right hand: my hand hardly pauses to consult me, because I am lost in an intense reverie of a remembered place.

From all this I conclude that, if one focuses the whole of one's conscious mind on one aspect of a creative problem, one's natural instinct will thus be freed to resolve things on another level and in its own terms. And I think this means, in relation to painting, that if the artist concentrates his mind upon his vision, his hand will take care of all those complex matters of design of which the finished painting primarily consists. One *cannot* consider a question of pictorial architec-

ture in cold blood—one *cannot* measure one form against another, as a cold calculation of mere design. The result will always be a dead design. One can only record the pictorial configuration from the standpoint of one's vision, one's deepest feeling. And, as I've tried to suggest, one's vision may be felt before it is seen. The unborn image, which is one's new picture, is something which first announces itself to one—as I've said—as a sudden access of energy in the pit of one's stomach, in one's arm, in one's fingers. It is felt before it is seen—for the simple reason that it cannot be seen until one's hand has created it on canvas. Even then the painter is incapable of seeing what he has done—at least, for a week or two. One thus has the sensation, as Picasso has noticed, that one's picture goes on changing of its own accord, long after one has ceased to interfere with its anatomy or have a hand in its constitution.

I have indulged in all this talk about the painter's processes because I believe that the painter and the potter (or weaver) have one thing in common, above all else. Both are dedicated to perpetuating the *creative act* in an age which is increasingly dominated by inhuman mechanistic processes. Our civilization depends, of course, for its continued existence upon its sciences, its technical skills and its brilliantly impersonal power to manipulate matter. No one, I imagine, really proposes that we should jettison science. Not even such cranks and lunatics as the modern painters or the hand-potters would advocate total withdrawal from the present position of advanced techniques for dealing with physical problems.

Yet the fact remains that potter, weaver, painter—all are equally aware of immense dangers inherent in the very nature of our civilization. Our potting, weaving, painting is not only an affirmation—an affirmation of our deepest, instinctive awareness that the very texture of life is dependent more upon organism than upon mechanism. It is also a protest. Our work is, at one and the same instant, an affirmation of faith and a protest against an encroaching enemy. What is this enemy we fear? I think we all recognize that techniques are capable of dominating men—rather than the other way about. I think we feel that technology is turning, on every hand, into technocracy. Man is becoming increasingly subject to mere processes. He is thus losing both responsibility, personality and his chances of happiness and fulfilment. So the 'cranky' potters and weavers and the 'mad' painters all protest. And of course it may be said that even the crankiest, wobbliest pots, the lumpiest cloth and the dottiest pictures are all effective in one

single respect: that they register *protest*. Even bad individual work is at any rate individual, a projection of organic values of some sort into a scene that is streamlined by impersonal mechanistic forces.

But now I want to return to aesthetics. Bad hand-pottery may succeed in registering a protest—but it can do little more. In order to perform the infinitely more important of the two functions, *vis-à-vis* society, which I have mentioned—in order to affirm positive values—craft must achieve the intensity of communication of art. Craft that is not art is not craft either. Nor is there, in my opinion, a separable, distinct entity called 'technique'. If the word 'technique' is not to be defined, simply, as *the power to materialize a concept*, the power to give concrete material form to what was previously an invisible complex (within the artist) of thought and feeling, of intellectual abstraction and emotion—then I do not believe the word possesses any real usefulness as applied to art. In the context of the applied sciences, of course, 'technique' has quite a different connotation. In such a connection 'technique' implies a practitioner's capacity to execute certain movements in the manipulation either of materials or of abstract ideas. In this sphere, technique can be measured—as it can, possibly, in the case of musical executants. One knows in advance how a given action can be performed: one knows, therefore, how to measure the comparative success of the performer, whether he be among the first violins; on the field at Lord's cricket ground; or in the chemistry laboratory.

But in the arts—which include, in my view, what are known as 'the crafts'—technique means something much subtler. We commonly complain that a painter's technique is faulty, or non-existent, when what we really mean is that the artist's aims are so unfamiliar to us that we are unconsciously assuming them to be something other than they in fact are. Technique in art cannot be measured in the abstract. It has to be considered in relation to each individual artist's unique aims. But once we know or can recognize these aims, we have already passed, at a bound, from a consideration of means to a consideration of ends. So I repeat—technique is simply the power to bestow visible, concrete, particular form upon what hitherto remained an abstract, invisible, unknowable entity. When we say an artist's technique is faulty we are giving him the benefit of the doubt to a quite unwarranted degree: we are making him a present of a conception which he has shown no signs of entertaining himself: in saying 'what he is trying to do is all right, but he doesn't know how to set about it', the 'what he is trying to do' is really a figment of our own imaginations. The artist does not exist

whose so-called vision is finer than his so-called technique: everyone does the utmost he is capable of doing: no one has a vision in excess of his power to materialize that vision. To suppose that an artist may get better is, however, quite permissible. Everyone gets better or worse all the time. But if what we mean is that such-and-such an artist may improve—we should say this, rather than suggest that his hand lags behind his mind and sensibility. In that instant in which a finer, bolder, more sensitive vision is granted to an artist—in that instant he knows the exact *means* for realizing his vision. In fact, awareness of those means *is* the vision.

I have laboured this point because I think it is vital for a proper conception of the creative process. But I hope I have not given the impression that I believe all creative procedure in the arts to be quite automatic, and thus devoid of intense and sustained intellectual effort. If I am not wrong, the nature of intellectual effort itself is that it follows a pattern I have already suggested. The rational faculty itself is not mechanistic and smoothly inevitable in its operations. In moments of the purest mental concentration we still experience, I should have said, a process of leaps and bounds. We jump to conclusions, almost literally. If $2 \times 2 = 4$ is demonstrated to me—I either leap to an appreciation of this mathematical fact—or I remain in the dark about it. I *do not* proceed smoothly and at an even pace along the railway line of logic, reaching conclusions as regularly as stations.

It seems to me that the arts of pottery and weaving will only remain arts so long as this intuitive apprehension of *life* is conveyed through the pot or the textile. A work of art consists in an arrangement of material factors being so ordered that they exist for evermore in a state of tension in relation to one another. The subtle asymmetry of a pot by Leach or Hamada is the asymmetry of life itself. You can analyse the construction of a pot by either of these artists in terms of geometry —but it will not get you very far. Geometry is there: the component formal members of the pot (its foot, belly, shoulder, neck, lip, as they are called) are describable, up to a point, in terms of arcs, straight lines and angles. But the pot lives and breathes. Conceived in motion, it appears ever afterwards to *move*, almost. *How* Leach and Hamada transcend the geometry of mechanical form and achieve the asymmetry of organic form is, in the final analysis, a mystery perhaps. But one can say a thing or two about their formal characteristics—their habits of formal composition.

The whole emphasis in the work of Hamada, Leach, Cardew and

others is, it seems to me, upon what I have called *submerged rhythms*. The modern tradition which these potters have in common is nourished by Sung, by Korean, by Japanese country pottery, by mediaeval English and English slipware. All these have at least one great quality in common: submerged rhythm. By this I mean, as I have tried to explain, that what we apprehend most immediately and most powerfully is not a series of sharply precise articulations at the surface of the pot: pure arcs or sharp angles at the meeting of rigid planes are nowhere in evidence. Indeed, rigidity is the quality most opposed to the essence of this whole group. Form is essentially fluid in Hamada or Leach, just as it is always blunted at its sharper extremities. We feel a powerful pulse in their pots: a rhythm that seems at its most emphatic just below the glazed surface. This is also a characteristic of natural forms—logs; boulders that have been washed by the sea; or even in the human figure, where the structural form is *below* the surface of the flesh—the bone is under the muscle.

I feel very strongly that in this respect precisely—its aspect of submerged form, submerged rhythms—the pottery of Leach or Hamada is utterly contemporary: the exact counterpart, in ceramic terms, of the sculpture of Henry Moore or the painting of Braque. Braque has said that the painter should put himself in rhythmic or formal sympathy with nature: he should not imitate it. By doing the first he gets close to that natural reality he loves: by the second, he estranges himself from nature. The first involves empathy, intuitive relaxation and the power to *absorb* nature: its products—whether in the paintings of Braque or the pots which contemporary Japanese 'country potters' are still making—are like natural phenomena; only they are controlled. In these modern Japanese pots, where thick dribbles of glaze are spilt down, vertically, over a more regular and perhaps horizontal pattern in another glaze, one witnesses the superb control of a natural energy—an energy which is inherent in the material. The results have the naturalness of lichen growing on rocks—which is also a close parallel with textures in Braque, in Moore, Marini or Reg Butler. Moore's figures *enhance* the life of the stone or wood they are carved out of. Leach or Hamada, or the old English slipware potter, or the country potters in Japan, all enhance clay. Their art does not seek to dominate natural material, but to co-operate with it. In my view, the reason why so much that is best in contemporary art and craft to-day has its power to move us is just this: it provides the most pertinent contrast with our power-ridden, science-ridden age which seeks to dominate natural

material wherever it encounters it—devitalizing both it and ourselves in the process. The art of the contemporary craftsman is of immense importance because it can recall the organic: it announces the truth that the mystery of life itself can still be proclaimed by a piece of cloth or a cup and saucer. The crafts are also, it must always be realized, the most consistent receptacles of abstract art. Man's will to form—and all form as such is abstract—is expressed in pottery and weaving no less than in painting and sculpture. If I believe this sense of form is of immeasurable importance to mankind—that may well be because, for me, the moral and the aesthetic have a single identity. Ethics are the aesthetics of behaviour.

5

CUBISM, CONSTRUCTIVISM AND THE ARCHITECT

Reflections in January 1948

It sometimes seems that painting is the art which, after their own, most naturally engages the attention of architects. If this is so, it is a point of considerable interest, because sculpture is nearer physically to architecture; we might have expected the ideas embodied in three-dimensional carvings to stimulate the architect more than pictorial ideas. But I think there are reasons why pictorial thought may be of more consequence to him than anything he can extract from sculpture. First, sculpture is physical in a sense in which painting and architecture are not. In scale, the norm for sculpture is more or less our own size: the sculptor stands opposite a lump of material roughly commensurate in volume with himself and with this lump he battles till his muscles ache. He puts his arms round it, feeling it and stroking it endlessly: for he is truly in love with it. A carving is not conceived in a medium foreign to itself, like architecture; or in a special department of the brain which *sees* that which does not exist, like painting. A carving 'grows' out of a particular hunk of wood or block of stone; from Michelangelo to Henry Moore sculptors have had the illusion, amounting to a conviction, that the finished work was lying before them, hidden in the uncut stone, which they had only to 'peel off'. Again, sculpture's effect on the beholder is more immediately physical than that of painting. No painting—with the possible exception of Renoir's

—invites you to unfold your arms and walk up to it to increase your knowledge by touching it; this is precisely and even primarily what sculpture compels. It is natural to stroke sculpture, but convention restrains us (or used to). Painting, though, first transmits to the brain that which, there transformed, runs down the spine as emotion.

But if sculpture is the most *actual* of the three arts, that is, if it requires the least interpretative activity on the part of the mind before it affects us, architecture is the most abstract; the least intimate in its operation and least immediate in execution. A building may exist whole in the mind of the architect who designs it, but it is never whole again: we walk round and round and in and out of it, but only another architect can translate and compress the evidence of the eye back into the complete architectural idea. But between the conception in the mind and the huge result, the building has to pass through the realm of the painter. No graphic image records the thing in its unity; but a hundred aspects are caught in as many drawings. Unlike the painter's drawings, however, the architect's have little or no affecting power. The conviction of reality attends the painter's jottings because he is not concerned with the precise communication of information, like the architect, but only with illusion. His drawings exist in their own right and the forms they evoke only in the imagination: whereas the architect's drawings do not exist in their own right but only as a means, a link, a practical step in the process of making something which is not a drawing. Yet their drawings have this in common—each is a flat surface broken up by shapes marked upon it. At this intersection of the techniques of their arts there is, it seems to me, an opportunity for the images and rhythms of the painter to penetrate those of the architect.

But there are other reasons for the influence which painting may exert on architecture. To begin with, most architects probably think in terms of a series of visual, if not pictorial, images; seeing first one and then another elevation and being chiefly exercised by the necessity to shuffle these images of the imagined structure with the purely abstract ideas of space which are expressed in a plan. Here a distinction between plan and elevation should be kept in mind: a plan is as abstract as mathematics and is in no sense an illusionistic image; but an elevation *is* such an image, albeit in a straight-jacket: illusionistic images are affected by painting. Le Corbusier claims, I believe, that his processes of conceiving a building are more organic than this one of the fitting together of plan and elevation. But one often feels that this or that elevation, a façade in fact, was his real starting-point, and not some

consideration of function or 'necessity' of the kind indicated by those scribbly diagrams in which mysterious arrows connect a series of balloons.

In an article entitled 'Architectural Backgrounds in XVth Century Italian Painting', which appeared in the first number of *The Arts*, Sir Kenneth Clark says: 'That architecture in painting anticipates actual building is a fact common to all the artists of the Brunelleschian group', and '. . . There are buildings in the background of Ghiberti and Donatello more audacious, more complicated and showing a better understanding of classical models than anything which the architects of the time had carried out.' But the effect on architecture of the pictorial rendering of the appearance of imaginary or projected buildings, which Sir Kenneth here describes, is obviously different in kind from the influence of architectural design by pictorial vision exercised in the twentieth century. In our own time architecture has registered the impact of two pictorial 'styles'—Cubism and Constructivism. In neither have artists created the likeness of an imagined building if only because the exact representation of any object (house, apple or landscape) has not been their concern. So, when one speaks of 'influence', it is more the transmission of an aesthetic, a way of seeing everything and anything, a predilection for certain rhythms, that one has in mind. Cubist treatment of a guitar, wine-bottle and crumpled napkin demonstrated visual values which have infected architecture, and much else besides. It is, of course, very natural that the visual imagination should manifest itself first and foremost in painting, which indeed exists to meet exactly this necessity: the necessity for continual re-statement of the relation of man's spirit to the visible forms of the outward world in which he lives. But a quotation from the most profound piece of writing on the subject of contemporary painting to appear in 1947 will best express the point I was making about influence. It is taken from M. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler's book, *Juan Gris: His Life and Work*, page 49:

> 'The vision of most men is almost perpetually confined to the domain of utility. Hence their great difficulty in attaining to an aesthetic vision on the rare occasions when they try: for they have so little material with which to construct their image of the outer world. Now what exactly is the rôle of painting in this construction? It provides the materials. The "graphic emblems" which it creates are stored up in the spectator's imagination: with them he builds his

outer world . . . this is what one might call the biological function of painting. It follows that, in painting, differences in handwriting create differences in the outer world.'

Painting, that is, changes the landscape for us. It is therefore clear that any additions to the landscape which we make in the form of buildings are likely (*if* the architect is one who can 'read', as Kahnweiler has it, the painting of his own time) to harmonise with the new look which painting will have conferred on that landscape—as upon everything else.

What 'new look' is the landscape wearing to-day, in 1948? As far as I can see two main influences are still at work; and still dominant: Cubism and Constructivism—and their immediate descendants. I am aware that with Constructivist art in general I have an imperfect sympathy—with the work of Mondrian, always; and with that of Ben Nicholson when he trades the circle and square to the exclusion of his other and more interesting devices; his Coronation mugs, bottles, Union Jacks, fish-floats and his pencilled silhouettes of Cornish farmhouses. This abstract art seems to me a futile if noble attempt to suppress a whole universe of legitimate pictorial ingredients in order to take other valid aspects to their furthest limits. It is the sort of operation which must receive our gratitude since it conclusively demonstrates a cul-de-sac, and thus spares us all the temptation to wander in a similar direction: and we recognize that genuine cul-de-sacs are only discovered and explored by genuine artistic intelligence. What we learn from it all is that form, unpermeated by its opposite, which is poetry, is meaningless: the poetry of a subject always impregnated Cubist forms, which gave off the atmosphere of café and studio very powerfully indeed. Ben Nicholson has roots in Cubist *collage* and this may finally rescue him from his more sterile exercises [the painting of his I reproduce[1] is a good example of the recent re-introduction of objects of personality in his work]. I once predicted that human beings may eventually slide into the pictures of this excellent artist: certainly a portrait by Ben Nicholson is an interesting conjecture.

But I see little possibility of modification in the attitude of the most important Constructivist of all. The work of Naum Gabo, who, after a number of years at Carbis Bay, left Cornwall to live near New York in 1946, provides the climax of this movement. His transparent

[1] See Plate 31.

'constructions' surely represent the furthest advance of this kind of thought; with Gabo we are not so conscious of the vacuum which the avoidance of a subject produces in Constructivist work generally. But the very fact that Gabo's inspiration—and indeed his conscious creed—allows no trace in his images of identity with any object outside the work itself means that his 'constructions' cannot be considered as sculpture or painting, which have always performed a dual function—they have existed in and for themselves *as well as* referring to, being 'like', to some extent, something outside themselves. Of the visual arts only architecture (devoid of the necessity to contain an echo of extraneous things) is entirely abstract. Non-figurative painting and sculpture always ends up by producing, even in the minds of its enthusiasts, some illusionistic reference to extraneous realities. Gabo's 'constructions' are miniature and useless buildings: they are idealized, and again useless, machines; that is to say, their *use* is aesthetic. The most abstract art in the world, Gabo's work has a poetry the subject of which is itself: it is the poetry of space, of organized air. They are the crystallized thoughts of an inventor, but one who is aware of the beauty of the machine-forms which come to him out of the blue: one who can afford to construct them in their useless, unfinished beauty because he is not calling them up, as an inventor would, solely in order to harness them and 'make them work': he is calling them up as objects of aesthetic contemplation. It is the romantic idealization of machinery: to fill the vacuum created by the exit of 'the subject', a subjective significance is magnified. Constructivist art is far more subjective[1] than Cubist. Indeed, Cubism is so objective in its relation to visual reality as to merit the label: Twentieth Century Realism.

Cubism never jettisoned any of the main ingredients of painting; indeed, it contained the central tradition in Western painting—of which it is an historic development—and it had, perhaps, its *purest* exponent in Juan Gris. The still-life by Gris which I reproduce[2] was painted in 1917. It seems to me to display a complex of images (in a concentrated, overlapping form) of the kind which dominated the best architecture between the wars. It is not by a trick of fancy that one sees, if one looks at this picture of a guitar and bottle with half-closed eyes, a modern villa in white concrete, complete with curved balconies over a port-hole window; cantilever concrete awning at the left; windbreak-

[1] This paragraph contains judgements which I would now modify. P. H. (1954).

[2] See Plate 11.

cum-chimney on the right of the flat roof; the whole thing beautifully placed in a setting of natural (round) rocks, concrete platforms or terraces, and lawns. This painting embodies formal generalizations which, since they satisfied a spiritual need of the age, were found valid in other contexts than that of a particular still-life arrangement and are familiar to us in a degraded form, applied to an endless variety of the objects of our twentieth-century lives.

If it seems now the case that this aesthetic, which emphasized forms that approximated to the forms of geometry, is in decline, architects in particular may be eager to see what is going to take its place. In their own art there is already discernible a softening of line; to-day an interest in detail and in more practical values is evident which detracts from the formal purity to which such things were subjugated in, say, 1930. Turning to painting we find that, the heretical Constructivist Puritans apart, the great creative figures of our time, Picasso and Braque (Matisse was less directly involved in the movements influencing architecture), have left their most abstract period as far behind as 1913. Indeed, Surrealism has come and gone in the intervening years—but it has made little impression upon the development of the pictorial language which is called painting, except, of course, as it affected the work of Picasso. Painters like Dali are as uninteresting as Royal Academicians where pictorial matters are concerned: their kind of Surrealism couches its essentially literary jokes, and juxtapositions of subject-matter, in a trivial photographic idiom that contains in itself not one ounce of surprise or novelty. The Surrealist element in Picasso is quite another matter and bears little relation to any feature in any artist who made his name purely as a Surrealist.

With Picasso the quality of unexpectedness, which, after all, is present to some degree in all creative work (every great artist has known how to allow himself to surprise himself: has known consciously how to court a measure of unconsciousness), is heightened quite naturally and without being elevated into a distinct and conscious trick. Surprise, to the intensity of hallucination or nightmare, is frequently present in his work; but it is integral to and derives from the whole pictorial experience, the plastic construction and the particular treatment—from each of which it is inseparable. Surrealism admitted more impostors than any other movement: attention was focused on the joke or shock and the pictorial process was relegated to a mere means of presentation. Now I do not need here to elaborate the point that painting makes no distinction between *means* and *ends*. In certain

essentials the standpoint of the great tradition in Western painting from Giotto to Picasso is consistent, although it has naturally been stated in very different *words* at different times: what might be called the idiom of criticism varies more on account of changes in contemporary 'mental climates' than on account of changes in the subject of criticism, namely painting. Certain modern utterances on the art of Cézanne strike *us* as far more revealing than the utterances of those of his few contemporaries who understood him or even than those of Cézanne himself. This is because criticism aims as much at destroying a particular (the current) misunderstanding as at creating a new understanding: in criticism, demolition and construction are inextricably bound up together and the former is frequently the more creative of the two activities. To say, for instance, what Picasso's art is not; and to make clear what that art does not attempt to do is a more positive action for the critic in a time of misunderstanding than to say what it is or does. What a painting by Braque or Picasso *is* is something we can only find out each for himself: understanding of or 'liking' for a work of art is a private and sudden, and largely indescribable experience. To transmit to him obliquely through writing what can only come to the reader directly from another source, namely from the canvas in question, this is an impossible task and one which leads the critic into a useless firing off of volleys of assertions.

One of the things that is present in varying degrees in, for instance (and I intend the utmost disparity *within* the categories that follow), Michelangelo, Picasso, Rembrandt, Cézanne, Poussin, Bonnard, Henry Moore, Constable and Matthew Smith, but is absent in varying degrees from Pieter Breughel the Elder, Paul Klee, Dürer, Blake, Memling, James Ensor, Turner, Sutherland and Gauguin is a sense of the complete identity of means and ends. With the first group, however varied their genius and unequal their greatness, the form is the apt and adequate vehicle for the poetry or other meaning. Everything that is expressed at all is expressed transmuted into colour, rhythm, mass and 'architecture'; the latter being composition, design, structure. No emotion is present which has not been thus dissolved in the pictorial medium. Form and content are one. But the painters in the second list have all strained the pictorial means in the attempt to achieve their ends—an attempt that is somehow too direct, too literal. Each has in his own way attempted to express something for which he has not found the *pictorial equivalent*. Thus in some measure each suspends the flow of pictorial rhythms by inserting passages in a different tempo.

To change the metaphor, it is as though a speech were continually to be interrupted by the insertion of phrases in another language so that we have the impression that the speaker's vocabulary is inadequate for the expression of his whole meaning. These interruptions, these departures from the pictorial vocabulary, may take several forms. They may exist as what I would call 'pictorial literalness': a visual description which is too detailed or too close to appearances in a variety of subtle aspects (appearances are in fact infinitely subtle and varied and so are the number of descriptive idioms or conventions which may justly claim to be founded on them—on 'true' observation). Blake's truth to what he thought of as anatomical facts is a case in point: such literalness as Breughel's rendering of hundreds of separate objects is another. These idioms are too close to appearances in one or two particulars for the artist to be able to evolve *a broad and harmonious pictorial equivalent for appearances as a whole*. Again, the disparity between form and poetry in the artists of the second list may result from a habit of straining individual forms in such a way that they stand apart from the concourse of forms in the picture and are unable to lie at ease in their allotted place in the pictorial architecture. This is seen when a particular emotion or idea seizes, as it were, upon a specific form or group of forms and insists on them becoming exclusively *its* vehicle, at the expense of a failure to discharge their abstract, formal duty. Such forms become expressive of a dominant, non-aesthetic meaning at the cost of falling out of step in the general harmonious concourse of forms which we call the architecture of a picture. An emotive quality usurps the position of abstract harmony in the pictorial economy. The term I would reserve for this characteristic of the second list above is Expressionist.

Now Picasso is remarkable for having created an immense extension in the range of 'pictorial equivalents'. Subject-matter and emotion that has never before found a legitimate entrance into painting, such as the artists of my first list created for the subjects of their pictures, has been introduced with total success by Picasso. Indeed, the most violently emotive material has been perfectly rendered into pictorial images and symbols of remarkable simplicity and power. But the cardinal point to recognize is that this is a process of the direct translation of spiritual, intellectual and poetic intimations. An equivalent in form and colour is *immediately* found for these realities: Picasso's faultless designs are forged to the order of these subjects of his apprehension. He does not, like Breughel, first create the likeness of an object which will, after it is

recognized by the spectator, operate upon him by virtue of what it represents, by virtue, that is, of association. On the contrary, Picasso creates very little 'likeness' and all his meaning spurts directly at us from the plastic, architectural actuality of his creations. If these intimations, these invisible realities, may be called Picasso's *subject*, this subject is in no way extraneous to or superimposed upon the abstract elements of form, colour and architecture: rather, the character of the abstract, formal configuration is determined by and is wholly expressive of the emotion of the subject.

The other great development of recent years is Braque's steady return from modes of complex Cubist distortion to one of greater simplicity and straightforwardness. Objects are no longer fragmented: a table, a chair, a window are presented whole and intact in some of his latest[1] works: indeed the whole scene—the table and chair before the open window—is now re-created by Braque with a truth to appearances which would surely have surprised his former self of, say, 1930. The broken planes are being withdrawn; the sudden transitions from one surface to another are largely discarded; from behind such purely formal manifestations the 'object' steps out once more; more recognizable than it has been for thirty years; more essentially itself, more fully re-created, than ever before in this great painter's career. Although the rhythms of these objects in Braque's pictures now correspond more closely with those of the real objects from which they derive, there is no sense of naturalism, no mere reproduction of appearances. What has happened is that table, chair, jug, window have re-emerged from hibernation in the depths of the imaginative mind as pure concepts. Each is an essence precipitated in paint. This achievement, together with the perpetual revolution of Picasso—to which it is complementary —sums up what might be called 'the present situation in 1948'.

What sort of aesthetic is spreading its concentric and widening rings from this activity? What effect will the lapping waves have upon architecture when they reach it? Comparing the present with the scene of twenty-five or thirty years ago, we are left in little doubt that the emphasis in painting has shifted from an exploration of form, with a static content, to an exploration of content (and the whole of human consciousness is the subject), with form more or less static, on a basis of Cubist discoveries. If we measure the change in terms of the still

[1] This refers only to those works known to me by the end of 1947. I have discussed the more recent canvases of Braque (i.e. 1948-54) in the essay devoted to him in this book.

lives of Braque and Picasso, we shall see that this form—both have painted more still lifes, at every stage of their development, from Cubism forwards, than any other subject—is of all others the most nearly adequate for the expression of the spiritual aspirations of the last thirty years. The actual furniture involved has changed very little: a preference for pears and vee-shaped wine-glasses in 1909 gave way to a liking for packets of tobacco, newspapers, guitars and crumpled table-napkins—and so on. Slight variations in their selection of indoor objects continued to be made right up to the present day. Coffee-pots, skulls, a rosary, a crucifix, occurred in Braque during the Second World War. Skull-and-book, tomato plant on window-sill, and a vacant framed mirror lying parallel to the picture surface have appeared in recent Picasso still lifes. However, the fact of the identity of these objects, in the case of Picasso, is still of less importance than the arrangements they give birth to and the particular psychic potency, malevolent as well as benevolent, which is generated by means of the symbolic forms which they are made to assume. On the other hand Braque now gives us works in which commonplace objects are transformed—not by *formal* daring and discovery, as in their original Cubist work, but by the revelation of latent *personality*. Each jug or glass, skull or coffee-grinder, candlestick or saucepan is found to be the carrier or receptacle of a fragment of Eternity. Each *lives*. Each inanimate vessel is the recipient of grace: it *exists*: and so it exudes meaning and will, if we contemplate it, speak to us of our own predicament. Such is the meaning of the 'exploration of content' that I spoke of. Objects in the paintings of Picasso and Braque are perfectly recognizable nowadays: yet their employment is subtler than ever before.

But I was wondering what impact this painting can have on the formal art of the architect. For architecture it must have a significance different in kind from that belonging to the formal revolution of Cubism. The very close formal accord of Cubist painting and inter-war architecture is unlikely to be extended in such an obvious manner in the future. Twenty years ago the two arts were sharing a common starting-point; the re-discovery of abstract form was their common preoccupation. That re-discovery is now assimilated: equipped with it, but less and less conscious of it, painting and architecture will go their own ways, facing their own problems.

Up to this point I have been trying to describe what may be called the contemporary situation in painting, and I have made tentative attempts to relate pictorial to architectural developments. Very

sketchily I have indicated the movements and counter-movements which stand for the most articulate of the desires, aspirations and fears which inhabit the contemporary spiritual ether. These constitute the proper subject of art because they are that which a contemporary creative mind is condemned to tune into willy-nilly. The architect, no less than the painter, is susceptible to—indeed he cannot escape—the play of these spiritual-aesthetic forces. He is not an impersonal, detached technician engaged in the abstract solution of mere equations. The architect is always, whether he likes it or not, an artist. If he is not a good artist, he is a bad one. The idea that architecture is more concerned with physical necessity than with aesthetics is, simply, a dangerous half-truth. In the fairly recent past it has led to an aesthetic theory—and also to a practice—which may be referred to rather vaguely as 'functionalism'. I think Sir Herbert Read pointed to the basic error of this conception when, writing of style in architecture, he said:

> 'a style is not a style until it has its beauty. But the beauty is born of the necessity; it is not an arbitrary choice; it is rather the exact solution of a problem.'

Nothing could be more harmful to the growth of a new architecture than the notion that the aesthetics of building are not integral to the entire architectural process of designing, from start to finish. It is precisely the idea that the architect is engaged in a *dual* activity, that I wish to question. To begin with it almost implies that an architect's aesthetic sensibility can, or should, be suspended during part of the process of designing a building: it suggests that 'the problem'—which the architect must solve—is restricted to the sphere of physical necessity. Artistic quality, it is implied, is an additional ingredient—something the architect may add when he finds he has finished the *real* work of allotting the appropriate space to the various departments in his building, and of relating these departments so that they serve the activities for which they are intended to be the setting.

All this presents an idea which I cannot accept. It seems to me that, if we have an aesthetic sense, if we have a personality to express—then, that sense must be permanently present in all our actions; it must affect everything we do. Sir Herbert says (in the passage I have just quoted) that architectural beauty lies in 'the exact solution of a problem'. There is a great deal to be said for this definition. But the trouble starts when you ask yourself, 'What sort of problem is it that can be solved with

such results that no aesthetic, positive or negative, is involved?' Does beauty automatically permeate the results of your work simply because you have concentrated faithfully on such workmanlike virtues as economy in space (and in execution)? or on clean strength in construction? or on such an efficient disposal of the various units in your design that they are perfectly related for the satisfaction of practical needs?

I suggest that none of these separate problems, however perfectly the architect deals with them, will, on their own account, automatically confer what we mean by beauty. Comeliness, perhaps. But, again, perhaps nothing more than a rather antiseptic efficient emptiness. It has never seemed to me that the really beautiful examples of modern architecture owe their beauty purely to the fact that they represent brilliant solutions to practical problems. The solution of the practical problems involved can be presented quite easily with a total absence of beauty. What strikes me as the really remarkable thing about a beautiful modern building is, quite simply, *its modern beauty.*

Now, beauty is a mystery, whether in architecture or in painting. And it is a subject we have tried to avoid for a long time now. We have tried to forget that beauty exists in its own right. We have called it 'an attribute'. We have said it *results* from sound constructional thought, in architecture: or, in painting, from as complete a surrender as possible to subconscious forces.

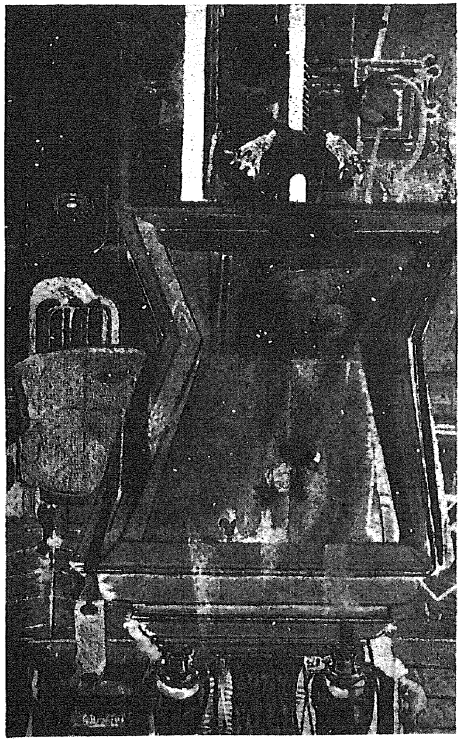
But the time has come to recognize once again that beauty will not always respond to such oblique approaches. We have discovered that an exclusive devotion to the needs of physical function may, un-allied to a more spiritual pursuit, only result in forms and constructions that are sterile of emotion and therefore merely ingenious as art. And in painting we have seen the results of the absence of a valid criterion, a conscious ideal of beauty. Whether in architecture or painting, the time has come to recognize that the creative process which ends in a work of art begins with an aesthetic experience amounting to a special sort of sensation—a poetic intimation; a visual image; a physically experienced rhythm.

I imagine it will not be disputed that modern architecture has registered the impact of the two developments in art I have mentioned: Cubism first and Constructivism second. And I think architects will probably agree that one of the main functions of painting (in relation to architecture), is its ability to provide architects with an aesthetic. Obviously the painter's medium is better suited than the architect's to what we might call the *exploration* of aesthetic reality.

In any case the historical fact is that modern architecture followed modern painting in emphasizing formal at the expense of associative elements: a branch of modern painting in its pursuit of form has tended to suppress, and even to eliminate all reference to, external reality—all reference to what is called a 'subject'. And, at the same moment in history, architecture dropped all those formal devices which had persisted for hundreds of years, and persisted mainly for associative reasons.

But to-day we recognize that, in painting, form is barren if it is divorced from poetic, associative elements. We have come in sight of a desert of meaningless abstraction and now we are being driven back to the subject again. It is true, of course, that Picasso, Braque and even Juan Gris never denied the imperative need for a subject in painting. The Constructivists have done just that. Nevertheless, the formal or musical aspect of pictorial expression is the aspect which they have emphasized, compared with their predecessors. And it is this formal inspiration that gave birth to modern architecture. The problem that interests me now is what will happen to architecture when painting has retreated from the position of extreme formalism?

So I put the question again. If painting is moving away from the exclusively formal, with its largely geometric idioms, what will happen to architecture? How will modern architects, while retaining the superb guiding lines, the marvellous skeleton of rectilinear Cubism and geometric Constructivism, how will they introduce the more mellow, more personal element of poetry? How will the hard and brilliant face of a building by Le Corbusier be modified in the next decade or two? In what fresh details will a kindlier, warmer and more personal feeling show itself? Many modern buildings have a ruthlessness, a sheerness of line. A brilliant logic shows in the disposition of masses. But few modern buildings as yet achieve that ultimate balance and calm which is the result of many different qualities uniting in subtle harmony.



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Georges Braque: The Billiard Table, 1949-52

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Georges Braque at work in his Studio at Varengeville, 1949

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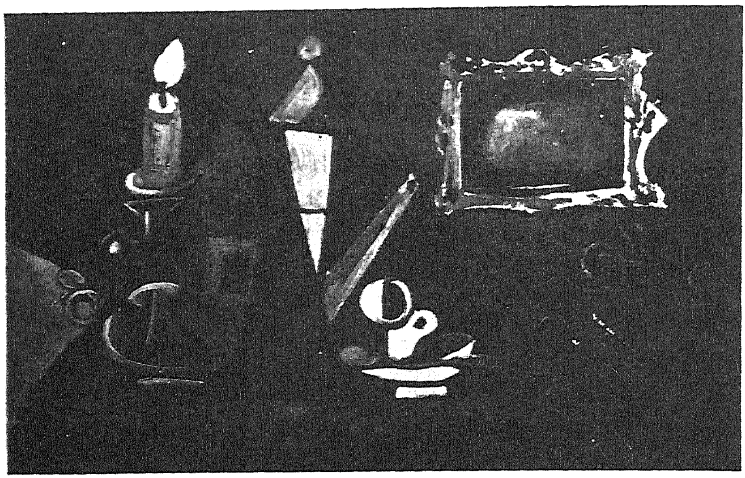
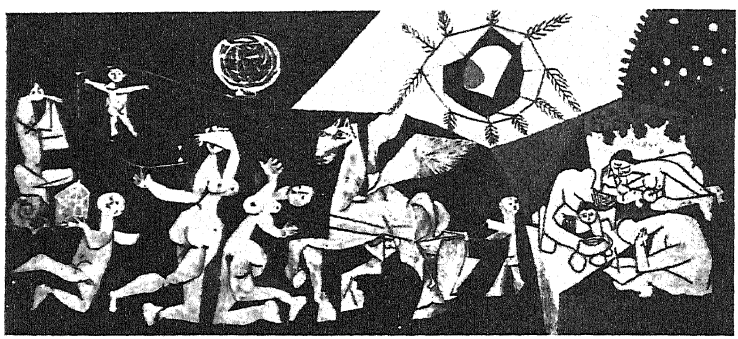
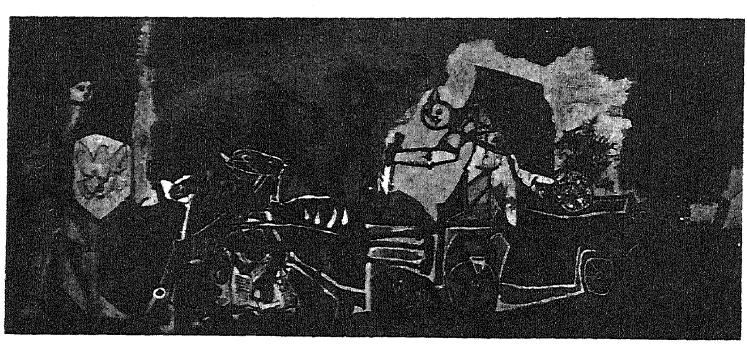


22 Pablo Picasso: Still Life with Candle; April 4; 1944



23 Pablo Picasso: Peace, 1952. (One of a pair of mural paintings, each measuring approximately 15 feet high and 33 feet long, at Vallauris.)



24 Pablo Picasso: War, 1952. (The murial painting which is the complement of *Peace*, plate 23.)

6

BRAQUE

To suggest, as I do, that Georges Braque is the greatest living painter is to remind a contemporary audience, fed to satiety on brilliant innovation, frenzied novelty and every variety of spontaneous expression, that, after all, permanence, grandeur, deliberation, lucidity and calm are paramount virtues of the art of painting. The calm of Braque is not that of one who has avoided the tension of conflicting passions; but rather of one who has proved capable, precisely, of sustaining that tension and resolving it in an equilibrium. His is the massive harmony and calm which formal profundity and technical certainty always bestow, even on the most disquieting subject-matter. The rival genius of Picasso has proved to the world that our age may be epitomized by works which are often devoid of these very qualities: with his unfailing sense of visual drama, his protean invention and his power of investing his creations with a hallucinatory poetry, Picasso has elicited gigantic assent from contemporaries for the mood and language which he himself has so largely created. Yet in doing this he has led a host of followers perilously far from that measured, meditated, constructive artistry and craftsmanship which supplies painting with its physical existence. Picasso values vision more highly than the picture; he desires communication more than design. For Braque, on the other hand, the painting itself *is* the vision; the design is the message. Picasso uses paint to project an image; Braque uses images to inform paint. We often receive Picasso's message, absorb his idea, in ignorance of or indifference to the actual means the artist has employed. This is impossible with Braque, with whom the thing communicated

is . . . a remarkable object, the picture itself; alive, mysterious, full of sensuous refinement and intelligence; yet durable in its substance and timeless in its impact and effect. Picasso seeks primarily to map the metaphysical landscape into which we are moving: the map, once read and understood, becomes a decoration on the wall; an unimportant object, compared with the region it relates to. Picasso's amazing achievement is not restricted to painting; and as painting it is therefore, it seems to me, denied supremacy. Braque, by contrast, heightens and elaborates the means of communication, until vision and material have become identical. The picture is not the vehicle of meaning: the picture *is* the meaning.

Nowhere is this unity more obvious than in his later works. Their very simplicity, the fact that they lay bare to our gaze the actual processes of their conception and growth, points to this unity of ends and means. The same is also true of his numerous drawings, lithographs and engravings of all periods, in which he ranges from those linear configurations which rear in space, and echo the themes on Greek or Etruscan vases, to the incredibly weighty silhouettes which, though often most realistic in profile, nevertheless fulfil the abstract demands of mass disposed against mass. Again and again we see the physical and metaphysical hobnobbing within the same composition. Braque's recent preoccupation with realistic silhouettes is seen to accord perfectly with the typical rhythms of his more abstract modes. In this great master of modern painting we find the most powerful fusion so far made of the abstract and the representational—two aspects of art which, isolated, either from the other, can only impoverish the painting of our time. I can imagine a London audience being profoundly impressed by the extraordinary degree of realism in many of Braque's paintings made since 1949. A one man show which he held at Galerie Maeght, in Paris, in June 1952, included perhaps a dozen canvases in which this new realism prevailed. Here were pictures—painted for the most part between 1949 and 1952—of sunflowers in a jug;[1] or cornfields under dramatically dark blue-grey skies; or of an empty grey seashore; or of boats pulled up against the sandhills; or of an old bicycle leant against a fence covered with, I think, convolvulus, a field and hedges visible beyond; or of a slatted garden-table standing in freckled garden light. Not that there was any trace of naturalistic modelling or imitative texture: all was conveyed in terms of interwoven silhouettes—silhouettes of any object and on any scale; a leaf-silhouette, a table-silhouette, both were units in an abstract design as tight and complex

[1] See Plate 21.

in its detailed organization as it was apparently loose and free in its larger pattern, its compositional design. Here, in fact, was a solution to our gravest problem—how to unite the impulse to abstract with the opposite impulse, which is to convey by some means of 'representation' the painter's poetic attachment to a subject. By combining, in his more recent imagery, the intensely realistic profile or silhouette of the objects which are his subject-matter (a leaf, a jug, a bicycle saddle, a studio chair) with a flat rendering of its mass, Braque has re-married the abstract to the representational. An exciting example of this marriage is *Feuilles, Couleurs, Lumière*. The essential double impact—of the subject on the one hand and of the picture itself, the 'flat' design, on the other—is perfectly demonstrated in this large lithograph in olive, cinnamon, grey, black and white. The rounded leaves in the jug are furry, fleshy—though conveyed only as flat matt silhouettes, in point of pictorial fact.

During the Second World War England was isolated from Europe, culturally, and thrown back on her own resources for a longer period than at any other time in recent history. I think that our painters suffered more from this state of affairs than their colleagues in the other arts. No one knew what the great French painters were doing: photographs of new work hardly ever came through to us, and at the end of the war, therefore, the prospect of at last finding out what had been going on in the studios of the great caused in some of us an almost feverish excitement. This was still the atmosphere, then, in which the Tate Gallery's large Braque exhibition of 1946 was received. We were not disappointed. The new pictures, painted entirely between the years 1940 and 1945, brought something that we could not have had previous experience of—a new development in an immensely powerful art. It was at once obvious that Braque had worked during the war years with a vigour and intensity that had brought his painting to a monumental condition; akin to Picasso in newness of vision, but to Poussin or Seurat in impersonal architecture and slowness of construction.

One always feels that he works very slowly, with his cement-on-canvas surfaces which suck the paint from the brush, inhibiting such rapid scribbling as we find in Picasso, and forcing him, when he would record a violent gesture, to take up the tube itself and squirt the blob, or trailing line, direct. Ift here is no cement, there is certainly sand, the quantity and coarseness of which is varied according to pictorial need: sand is mounded half an inch high along the underside

of the frying pan in *Kitchen Table* (1942); a superbly sooty concentration!

But sand was brought to the slow processes of these canvases as an assistant at the realization of a vision which is essentially involved with flat areas of even tone-colour. The thin washes settle into the gritty surface as a matt stain; and a stony opacity well becomes the vision. Dividing and bounding these carefully plotted areas run channels and low walls of paint, dragged on by a hand miraculously sensitive and expressive in its touch: the lightest flicks reflect the rhythms inherent in the whole conception, very much as small strands of rock on the Kerry coast are microcosmic illustrations of that coast's general geography. A particular function of these lines of 'drawing' which mark contours, separate overlapping forms, or, most Braque-like of all, subdivide single masses and forms (since 1918 Braque has reduced the modulated cylinder that is a jug to two flat patches divided by a zigzagging line, and we never tire of it for it has profundity) is in connection with colour.

By heightening these streaky boundaries to intensities of whitish-blue, blue-black, dark crimson or brown, Braque makes adjacent flatnesses spring to life and three-dimensional meaning. Observe, for instance, the back of the half-nude in a big picture like *La Femme à sa toilette*, painted in 1942, with the prussian blue ewer and basin before the dazzling window with four panes (and how very daringly this window fits the top right-hand corner of the canvas, the lines of window-frame and canvas-edge lying exactly parallel—a device one would have expected to be fatal to a composition of this kind). The even pinky-beige of her back, of which the first impression must be that it is too even, too empty (until we sense that this is an emptiness strangely potent and integrated, one of Braque's personal secrets, in fact), is acted upon by a flashing white-on-blue line drawn round the profile of the shoulders, arm and face.

Here we find that the description of cold, gleaming, morning flesh has been condensed into this single brilliant rim-line. All the reflections and the modelling of the back are swept aside by the large, flat, pinky-beige piece, only to be evoked again, with a vividness unequalled in their natural dispositions, by the single line at the profile.

This concentration of the evidence of the eye is characteristic of much that is best in modern painting, and is particularly characteristic of Picasso and Braque. The 'emptiness' to which I referred, which is only a new and unfamiliar arrangement of the material of appearances,

and is therefore only empty of familiar formulae, is particularly exciting in Braque's works of this period—1940-45. The complexities of appearances have been wonderfully resolved in these matt surfaces which are dovetailed in so simple and grand a manner. Nothing but a continuous contemplation of the visible world could have inspired such original arrangements of form and colour. We are very wide of the mark if we attribute them primarily to a supreme faculty of *decoration.* One of the things that misleads us about this is the fact that everything seems to be there, at the surface. We never have that experience, so common with the painting of other times, of looking *through* brush-work, subtle as a cloud, that invisibly blends colour with the forms which our eyes seek. The 'surface consciousness' which so largely began with Cézanne (in modern times) is complete in Braque, for whom subtlety of definition of three-dimensional form is possible in terms that are palpably at and of the surface—a surface perpetually reinforced in our consciousness by its load of grit, opaque and final. Each of the modern masters of Braque's generation can, in his own way, evoke and define the subtlest complex of natural forms by surface shapes, gestures and textures that are always new, and which, being new, appear to many to be crude, simple, a short-cut through subtleties with which they are more familiar. In this context Picasso's line-drawing might be recalled, in which a single line can define a human figure with a factual efficiency and precision that many photographs would leave unequalled.

And so, although you may feel that there is the minimum of expression, either of fact or feeling, *within* the even, gritty expanses of some of these war-time paintings (in the great brown oblong of wall behind the billiard table, perhaps, in the picture of that name painted in 1944), what you *will* find is an extraordinary interaction perpetually in process *between* these big bare units in the pictures. Each section of the design—so simple and quiet when you are looking straight at it—begins to nudge and jostle its neighbours the moment your eye is in motion again. Great force is locked up inside every calmly plotted shape; often the simplest shapes, so chic and debonair in their clean, cool, fresh paint (their obvious aspect, at the surface), often these are the most explosive; are, in fact, powerful symbols of Life itself. Inspiration comes at once from within and without; and while the force that inhabits a Braque wine-glass or guitar is certainly nameless, such transformation of what is literally the furniture of our lives could only be conceived in a mind which knows its way about in the world of natural appearances.

But in considering this clandestine activity in Braque's pictures, these jostlings, the restlessness of these calm shapes, there is another factor: something that is inherent in the nature of design and pictorial organization. Every articulate segment in the whole, every fragment or unit of form, each piece in the jig-saw puzzle of the total composition has many aspects although appearing to have only a certain single identity when we are focusing directly upon it. This, however, is immediately modified when our glance moves elsewhere. Each unit, in other words, is both itself and an infinite number of variations on itself which are in accordance with our momentary 'reading' of the picture: I shall illustrate this further on. Furthermore, the function of *lines*—especially Braque's lines—is more complex than is usually recognized. Every line operating within the strict economy of these designs defines in at least two directions simultaneously, describing and terminating whatever lies to the right and left of it. The 'reading' which is momentarily the strongest will be the one relevant to the side from which our eye approaches. But the other meanings are latent, and the eye has only to swoop back from another direction for that first meaning to be submerged in a second, or a third meaning. Hence the elusiveness and richness of what seems so static examined in its particulars. And perhaps it is worth mentioning that a line does not *necessarily* 'define in two directions simultaneously'. For instance, the line in a Toulouse-Lautrec defines *inwards*—he is more conscious of the form he is enclosing than of the shape of the space he is excluding. This is not true of Braque.

In one of the largest pictures of this period, *Intérieur: 1942* (Plate 19), we can grasp pretty quickly the total data in the scene depicted: the small oblong table with its four knobbly legs showing below the folds of the tablecloth: then the objects upon it, the plant-pot with its lovely leaf-balancing plant: the palette with brushes coming up through the thumb-hole: the single fruit, rather flat like a tangerine, on its plate: the inevitable wine-glass, standing on a bit of darkish paper: then, to the left, a wooden chair with slits in the seat and an open back, and behind all, the parallel lines of some moulding in the wall: lastly, cutting up across everything else, the two great transparent sword-shapes; the outlines, only, of two forms which are obviously very much nearer the artist's eye than anything else in the picture, so near, in fact, that he sees through and round them because he is focusing upon the table, three times as far away. Although these are pleasantly suggestive of the great leaves of some exotic indoor plant, a suggestion reinforced

by the grey-green tones of the whole picture, a consideration of other paintings by Braque confirms the view that they are two of the four supports on his rather imposing easel. So much for the inventory. Looking at this remarkable picture, one is soon pretty familiar with all the formal pieces that present the scene to us: it is not until one's eye begins to circle rather more aimlessly that other significances are ready to emerge.

As I look at the right background—the wall, where it is in black shadow—my eye is quickly drawn down to the dark paper under the wine-glass; and thence is rapidly compelled still further down (or forward) to the dark half of the palette; here it swiftly circles the interlocking arcs of that object's outline before sweeping on to the next dark island of interest, the shadowed table-leg below the palette; this is a jagged shape, and at once something right away to the left, across the table, begins to vibrate in the same key of dark sharpness—so across goes my eye, to find that it was the dark oblong holes in the back of the chair: from these it is a natural jump to a piece of black wall again, this time the section behind the wonderful, floating sword-leaves of the flowerless but trembling table-plant; and there I have virtually completed a circuit. But this is only one out of an almost infinite number of such circuits possible; only the beginning of an eye-dance that can go on indefinitely, according to the relations your mind and eye are seeking out. Always a new antithesis of shape, or a new correspondence, can be found all round the circle: when my eye is in one place, a shape elsewhere that I thought I knew begins to wink and call for re-examination, and, re-examined, proves to be *different* again! This is what I mean by reading a picture—and, incidentally, it might be noted that this activity exists in time as definite as that needed for the unfolding of themes in music: the idea that a picture is 'all there, all the time' is only equivalent to noting that the record of the music, i.e. the score, is also 'all there', in the book on the piano. But the reading of a picture and the playing of music have a rhythm in time: what can be *immediate* in both cases is only an *impression* of the whole. But to conclude about *Intérieur*, the significance of each part of the picture that my eye visited altered according to the direction from which it was approached. The palette seemed full of rotundities when I was coming up to it from the jagged table-legs: but the same palette seemed a long, drawn-out shape, sharp and thin, when I approached it by way of the wine-glass and the *round* fruit. This, then, is part of what I meant when I said that these flat shapes of Braque's are potent and subtle beyond

their appearance: that, flat as they are, and essentially of the surface, the pictorial activity that is concentrated in them is as great as we could wish for from the greatest painters.

And here I would make a few obvious points. Braque is the genius of a metropolitan existence: until he made the realist landscapes and seashore paintings (which I have already mentioned) in the last three years or so there was hardly a landscape to his credit since his pre-Cubist, Cézannesque days (there were more beach scenes round about 1930 and '38). Neither does his vision readily embrace the human figure: when it does appear, we feel that it is by kind permission of the table and chair. Animating the inanimate, brooding over the *personality* latent in a limited repertoire of household objects—furniture, food and dados—he is, I suppose, one of the most 'intellectual' of painters. The figures of ornate wallpaper, bulging Victorian mouldings, and the knobbly legs of tables, imitation graining and marbling: these have eaten into his soul, and a poetry has germinated there. But, despite the saturation of all his processes with such urban fantasy, I think it is, above all, the originality of his formal organization and the compressed power of his design that makes him the great painter we know him to be.

In June 1949 I happened to have the good luck to spend a little time in Braque's studio in Paris. I remember that the first thing I was aware of as I went into the large room with its wide window facing south—not north—was a familiar black jug. This jug was floating in mid-air somewhere in front of the creamy gauze which was drawn like a transparent screen across the window to break down the sunlight into an evenly diffused radiance or glow. Against this the potent, black jug was a startling profile, a commanding symbol. It was simply a piece of thin copper or tin sheet cut out into a jug silhouette, turning now and then on an almost invisible thread. Its very blackness and flatness—the fact that it was only a silhouette—for a moment defeated one's attempt to place it in the space in front of the window; when it faced slightly to right or left you didn't know, with immediate certainty, which way it *was* facing. As an image it exuded a certain startling but calm power. It had the animistic quality possessed by all Braque's images of inanimate objects—at any rate by those appearing in his works since 1940. This special aura, this quality of being alive—of the *objects* being alive—is also of course typical of Picasso's creations; but the jug I am talking about had a reassuring elegance and ***silence*** to offset the dis-

quieting aura of strange independent life. Such calm and elegance, as well as the sense of absolute finality in a form, are things Braque does not share with his great contemporary—but retains, exclusiyely, for himself alone. Picasso excels in invention; his works are like blueprints for endless new contraptions; new machines for cutting away the superficial appearance and revealing Reality's substrata. But Braque never leaves anything at the blueprint stage; he always carries out the plan, the idea, till he arrives at the last touches, which are often touches of pure adornment. Even his simplest sketches have the rich quality of something utterly complete, utterly final and worked out: in the most summary of his little line-drawings there is an amplitude, a sense that the idea has been bodied forth with physical completeness. Braque shuns the diagrammatic, even in sketches: but Picasso cannot wait to give even large paintings that elaboration of texture, that extra care and loving feeling which would make them more than a brilliant sort of shorthand—a shorthand sometimes conveying little other than the first sketchy idea of an image. Picasso states the bare bones; Braque puts flesh on the skeleton and clothes on the flesh.

Now Braque himself was in the studio (see Plate 17) when I was shown in: but I was aware of this floating jug—and of the two large canvases on two easels side by side, which I shall mention in a moment —*before* I noticed their author. It has since struck me that this was what I might have expected: it was certainly as it should have been, because, as I say, Braque extols jugs more than human beings. In a typical Braque interior the girl sitting among the uprights of easels, nursing a guitar as tenderly as a baby, is only one more object, though an exciting one, among many other objects—and they are all exciting of course. Perhaps it is *because* human beings appear in his works on more or less equal terms with pianos, easels, palettes, guitars, climbing indoor-plants and garden chairs or tables of ornate iron-work, electrically tense, that all these objects are invested with life and dignity? He is certainly the greatest living master of still life. And perhaps this is because his still-life objects are far from being still, or dead: *nature vivante* would be a better title than *nature morte* in Braque's case; for, as I say, he animates the inanimate, he gives a living presence, an almost hypnotic personality to everything—to an ugly old vase, or a potted fern, an oil lamp, a little table with complicated legs, a jug sprouting with brushes instead of flowers, two black fish on a grey kitchen-plate, or a bedroom washstand with an enigmatic sponge and hairbrush patiently waiting beside a placid basin. All these and many other objects

in a considerable repertoire spring to life in the paintings which Braque has made since 1940.

Before 1940, although I would not say that he was concerned with formal values *at the expense* of the objects involved, he was perhaps more interested in abstracting an overall rhythmic structure than in evoking the intrinsic qualities of his subject-matter. But that is not to say that the subject was ever unimportant: neither Braque nor Picasso is or ever has been a non-figurative painter; both have always created images which have a close connection with visual reality.

Now I want to try and say what it is that distinguishes the sort of animism which we find in Braque's still life from the kind we sense in Picasso's. And Picasso is certainly the only painter who compares at all with Braque in this business of *animating the inanimate.* No one can doubt that Picasso, too, can extract significance from almost any situation, any object, any scene, however drab or commonplace. But where Braque is sensitive, responsive, receptive; capable of sensing the true character of things and places, Picasso is dominating, aggressive. His extrovert powers will mould the chosen subject to his will. Braque will translate the hidden essence of a thing: Picasso will merge that thing in his own essence. I would say, therefore, of Picasso's fantasy, that it shows a scant respect for the subjects of his pictures: it even seems to reverse the rôles they play in reality—so that we could almost say that Picasso's men and women become jugs and lamps, and *vice versa.* This, of course, is very fascinating. Yet at no point does Picasso's fantasy lead one back again to its original point of departure—that is to say, to our real, natural, calm, unhallucinating, permanent surroundings. But this is precisely what Braque's imagination does for us. As often as not, Picasso's objects, no less than his creatures, are stripped of their natural quality; their real nature is ignored or violated, caricatured, to such an extent that living things are petrified, while the inanimate are invested with crazy life.

Now Braque also invests objects with life, as I have already repeatedly said, but by a process quite the opposite of Picasso's. Braque does not *guy* objects or persons; he enhances them. He is infinitely kind to all the things that go into his pictures. Indeed, the kind of life which he bestows on his coffee-pot or coffee-grinder, his table, his chair and window, is just the sort of life we feel these things are really living! The personality with which Braque invests his jug is something that the jug really possesses in its own right. In other words, Braque divines the essential spirit—one might almost call it

the 'soul'—of each object that he paints. For this reason we have the feeling that a Braque jug is just as real and valid, just as much a distinct entity, as the jug that comes from the potter's wheel. This is one reason why I have called him a 'realist'. Although they are two-dimensional,[1] Braque's images of a leafy plant in a plant-pot, or of three peaches lying in the folds of a white napkin, are not merely pictorial reflections of these things; the two-dimensional version, on canvas, seems to exist in its own right, as a new object—involving, not imitational, but actual and new forms. The two-dimensional jug on the canvas and the three-dimensional jug on the table are, let us say, cousins, leading different but parallel existences. 'Art is a harmony *parallel* to nature,' said Cézanne; and no statement could be more accurate. This is a truth especially valuable to bear in mind when dealing with Braque or Picasso; though it is just as true of the good naturalistic painters of earlier periods. (There are very few good naturalistic painters, if any, to-day.) It is true because the imagery of a Constable or a Corot is not, as some appear to think, identical with Nature, with natural appearances. Constable's painting is still a language which has to be learnt: a Constable elm tree is still *a convention* for an elm tree; and some of his contemporaries failed to see any connection between the two—between the convention and the tree: just as many people to-day fail to see the connection between the images in modern pictures and their counterparts in exterior reality.

When, early in his career, Braque departed from the natural sequences of exterior reality, he did so in order to create a synthesis that would give us a new and more powerful sensation of reality itself—not the old illusion of reality that the old representational methods exploited; but an altogether new and direct experience of reality as it exists outside the picture-frame in three dimensions. And that is precisely what Cubism did. To begin with, early on, Braque's forms were fractured forms; they were not representational shapes that had been twisted and distorted: they were new forms welded together out of the abstract components which a Cubist analysis, a Cubist eye, had first extracted from natural appearances. And these component parts, with which Cubist compositions were built, were usually single planes or facets. Up to 1912 these single planes dominated the Cubist canvases of Braque and Picasso at the expense of the subjects of their pictures. Forms—of still life; or the forms of figures, and even landscapes—

[1] Literally. But not, of course, in their pictorial effect.

were in the process of being broken down into their component surfaces or planes. This period is referred to as the period of Analytical Cubism, and in essence it was still Cézannesque; it was an extension of Cézanne's process of analysing the infinitely suggestive, unanalysable surface of real objects, both natural and man-made, in terms of planes. These planes were seen as a system of separate but interlocking facets. Naturally, this process resulted in the fracturing of the total form of each object—each apple, jug or wine-bottle. Thus, as separate images, these objects tended to disintegrate and melt away into the overall rhythms of an abstract composition. In this way the identity of each object was partially obscured by the rising sea of liberated planes—planes of which the objects had nevertheless been the origin, the matrix. But even at this point Cubism was not 'abstract', in the extreme sense in which Constructivism is abstract. The original objects in their setting of real, sensuous space were still there—behind the buff-coloured planes; and we could even assert that this analytical phase was still the direct result of Cézanne's methods—for in Cézanne's final works the planes had already begun to detach themselves from the objects they described or evoked.

Now, during this period of Analytical Cubism what I have called the *personality* of an object was of less interest to Braque than that object's structural, its purely formal qualities. However, in 1912 the tide turned, and from then on the object began to impose itself once more on these abstract, compositional forces which had almost succeeded in subjugating it. From then on the *kind* of rhythm, the *kind* of form, that Braque employed owed its character to the *kind* of object he was depicting. Thus, subject-matter and the poetry that springs from it were re-introduced into painting at the very point when it was beginning to be assumed that they had been expelled for ever. And this is the state of affairs that has prevailed ever since: the jug has gained continuously in personality and importance; and 'the jug', in this context, means any object depicted by the painter. But if this is true of this great central figure on the stage of modern art, it is not true of younger artists. The pure abstraction of Constructivism, as well as the often over-cerebral, derivative abstraction that prevails among younger French painters, are sometimes anaemic; both movements are on the periphery of what is certainly the projection into our own time of the main European tradition—the painting of Braque, Picasso and Matisse.

The five or six years after 1940 are very important in the history of

the personality of 'the jug', because during this period Braque abandoned a whole vocabulary of form. Suddenly tables, chairs, washstands, grand pianos, walls and windows, jugs and plant-pots, coke-stoves and sideboards—all these began to appear in his paintings, unfractured by the Cubist jigsaw surfaces—surfaces of which differently coloured segments, juxtaposed, had been evocative, not of many, but of a single plane. But now, from 1940 to 1946, the top of a table would be created as one sheet of blue or black or khaki. True, it would veer up into a semi-vertical position: that is, until it is in a position more nearly parallel to the picture surface. But what we might call the up-ending of all receding planes such as table-tops or receding walls is a constant feature in Cubist and (though to a lesser extent) Fauve painting. If the table-top is up-ended it will offer more resistance to the eye. Also, such planes can be more emphatically related to the picture surface than diminishing ones. Whenever the picture surface is as important as it is to-day, we find the same tendency to swivel diminishing or receding planes round into a position in which they confront the spectator with a wider expanse than in normal diminishing perspective. Piero della Francesca does this with his receding planes. He also flattens the near surfaces of rotund objects. And who, among the great masters of other ages, is nearer to us at present than Piero?

In his next phase, however—perhaps from 1948 onwards—Braque's composition became more complicated once again; but in a new way. In the two unfinished paintings on his easel which I saw when I was in his studio in 1949, the objects were the objects of the studio itself. Easels, palettes, jars filled with brushes, a bust, a huge vase, a little lamp, and, behind the uprights of easels, a huge silvery thing with three fingers or brackets on the right and one on the left. This hinge—and that is what it was: it was rather like the steel or chromium-plated hinge of a safe or oven—is floating through the air amongst the angular but very realistic silhouettes of studio gadgets and paraphernalia. Indeed, its outline is seen *through* their outlines, much as a large bird in slow flight appears to pass through intervening treetops. But, of course, this whiteish hinge *is* a bird! Couldn't it be the 'Dove of Peace'? I asked him. 'Naturally,' he replied. 'Isn't Peace a universal preoccupation now?'

Braque has made five or six large versions of this picture: they are called *The Studio*, *1*, or *2*, or *3*: and he painted a number of them at the same time; indeed, almost simultaneously, moving from one easel to another, even to a third, and then back again to the first, all within a few

minutes (see Plate 18). One version, *The Studio 2*, was seen in the exhibition entitled 'The School of Paris', which came to Burlington House in 1950-51. The complexity of these canvases is one of interlocking, transparent, but more or less realistic outlines or profiles in white or pale grey on a darker brown. Often each object consists solely of these linear outlines filled in with a single plane of dark colour—or not filled in, leaving a transparent image. The plastic element, which hitherto had always depended upon a contrast of *planes*, might thus have been reduced to a minimum or even lost altogether. But Braque, though he was like Picasso in becoming more ideographic in 1950 than ever before, had not sacrificed the plastic quality in the least. In these wraith-like jugs and easels, which we sometimes see clean through, he had combined weight and density with a sort of ideographic essence. I must say that I think these later works, taken together with the even more recent and more realistic ones I've mentioned, represent the supreme achievement in painting since the war. Quietness, slowness, patience, and an exceedingly contemplative and profound approach seem to me to place Braque above the slapdash brilliance of the Picassos of the present decade.

Finally, it must be recorded that there has for long been a rather different activity going on in Braque's studio in recent years. At the same time that he has been at work on these highly intellectual masterpieces, with their interlocking, semi-transparent, yet immensely complex, dense, solid forms; or upon the still more recent and more realist pictures of the seashore, the sunflowers (see Plate 21), the cornfield (the near ears of wheat might almost be in *collage*, or, rather, they might *be* ears of wheat glued into the yellow and golden khaki and pale brown paint) Braque has also been in the habit of making very small paintings in extremely free, thick pigment, for part of his release and pleasure. These are usually still life. I remember yellows as thick as egg-custard; blacks as lumpy and powdery as charred bits of wood. The vision—a black plate against a yellow ground; Naples-yellow cherries, or whatever, spinning up through the layers of black paint which are the plate. This is no more Cubist than Bonnard. Braque explains that these little passionate by-products of his art are intended to register 'l'émotion directe'.

Is that explanation an admission? A confession that, on the whole, painting for him is not a *direct* expression of emotion; is not an unreservedly *spontaneous* activity? Certainly it is! 'But,' you may protest,

'we thought it was agreed that, in art, the good and the spontaneous were synonymous?' With this we arrive at the crux of the matter—or rather, at the central clue to Braque's personality. I would say that the main reason why I regard Braque as being a better *painter* than Picasso is precisely because Braque has not succumbed to the triumphant criterion of our time, which is *Spontaneity Is Always Right!* It is not. Spontaneity can become a disease. The world is full of faked spontaneity; full of conscious 'unconscious'; full of thought-up 'emotion'. One of Braque's many aphorisms—which are to be taken most seriously, unlike the aphoristic utterances common to many painters (in fact they have been published by Maeght as *Cahier de Georges Braque:* 1917-1947)—runs: 'I love the rule which corrects the emotion.' The tension of emotion corrected gives Braque's painting its unique significance. In it, heart meets head; hand meets eye; idea meets reality; essence meets form; ghost meets fruit; Night meets Day.

In the painting of Braque the monotony of the subconscious is relieved by intellect: the autonomy of the conscious is frustrated by emotion.

7
PICASSO

I BELIEVE Gertrude Stein once asked Matisse and Picasso the same question: Is it with the same eye that you look at the tomato you are going to put into a still life and the tomato that appears on your breakfast plate? Matisse said they were different eyes: it was an 'aesthetic eye' that he turned upon the tomato to be painted; for the second tomato he had a more ordinary eye. Matisse was aware of frontiers to the areas which his art might exploit. But Picasso insisted that with him it was the same eye in both cases; he must, he said, paint 'the eat' that the tomato implied. And, certainly, very many implications of the tomato, or of whatever object is in question, are or can become his 'subject'. He has never restricted himself to the visual connotation of things or been preoccupied with arrangements and rearrangements in the material of *appearances*, merely. Picasso has never, in fact, been concerned with any *single* aspect of the things he paints. His passion for whatever becomes 'a subject' causes him to stretch the means of expression out of one convention, into another, and still another; always succeeding in expressing the inexpressible; always conveying *everything* that his subject can suggest to him—the whole dream to which it gives birth in him! And *dream*, by the way, not *truth* or *beauty*, is the word he has chosen to describe his aims, or rather his discoveries, his 'finds'; for such a dynamic procedure cannot know whither it is itself leading. The future has always taken Picasso by storm, in much the same way that his works affect us.

He has said (and his artistic self-consciousness is surely the most profound on record):

'A picture is not thought out and settled beforehand; while it is

being done it changes as one's thoughts change. And when it is finished it goes on changing, according to the state of mind of whoever is looking at it. A picture lives a life like a living creature, undergoing the changes imposed on us by our life from day to day. At the actual time I am painting a picture I may think of white and put down white. But I can't go on working all the time thinking of white and painting it; colours, like features, follow the changes of the emotions.'[1]

Up to a point this paragraph is only unprecedented for the acuteness of Picasso's awareness of his own creative processes: what he describes and makes conscious is the nature of activities common to many artists before him—a fact, of course, which they might have denied, had it been put to them. Nevertheless, the difference in degree is extreme and unique, and its measure is seen in this single respect of the advance in self-consciousness. Even with Picasso's predecessor in the line of giants, Cézanne himself, there lingered the idea that, when he was painting, he was 'studying Nature'; that it was a battle with external appearances, with their infinite subtlety, in which he was engaged: the wresting of a secret. In Cézanne's mind, that is to say, his own struggle sometimes had the appearance of that objective concern with phenomena which we associate with science. On the other hand he had the originality to say that he was only concerned 'to realize his *sensations*' before Nature, and that 'art is a harmony *parallel* to Nature'—two magnificently articulate statements.

It is probable that articulateness is a characteristic of our contemporaries everywhere; and extreme articulateness as such seems to me not unconnected with spiritual plight and mental stress. Be that as it may, ours is a time of acute introspective awareness, and of attempts at a knowledge of psychological processes. In the field of art it is Picasso who leads, as in so many other respects, in the matter of the new self-awareness. We often have the feeling, before his pictures, that here is painting at a remove, as it were, in consciousness: that this painter is not presenting his awareness of any subject so much as his awareness *of* that awareness. The process of painting becomes more and more the subject of a painting—but always the imprint of the original and concrete subject remains, and is, in fact, reduced by this means to a compressed and potent form, to a quintessence of itself that acts far

[1] For more of this consult Christian Zervo's 'Conversation with Picasso', reprinted in *The Painter's Object*, G. Howe Ltd., London.

more powerfully upon our emotions than the original, for the original was diluted with reality. Obscured, diffused and latent in its context of the everyday.

From our position in the Picassian present we feel that we may, without presumption, attempt a restatement of Cézanne's attitude for him. To us it seems that for Cézanne that moment when his eyes were crossing and re-crossing the visible surfaces of the natural world, apples and ginger-jars, or trees, rocks and houses—that that was the moment when the vitally significant rhythms of his inner vision came most clearly to consciousness, suddenly projecting themselves, mirage-like, *between* the painter and the scene that he contemplated: a dancing imagery *that was the transformation* he so desperately, so persistently sought for those apples and those trees. The tension between 'inner' and 'outer' was thus perfect; the inner appearing only when he had given himself up completely to the 'study' of the outer.

With Picasso there seems to have been no such condition for the emergence of images, and latterly symbols, which were, from the first, saturated with meaning of a spiritual order. He seems never to have had to flog appearances for a meaning. 'Meaning', one often felt, was in danger of overwhelming whatever vehicles, forged from natural appearances, the painter could place at its disposal. Coffee-pot and candlestick seemed but barely held by the particular convention in which the painter had imprisoned them: stirring from the frame, they might engage in a deadly combat with one another, or worse—a sort of guerilla warfare upon the psyches of the living.

Such is the power of his fantasy. But in fact it is never, of course, manifested in terms which violate plastic unity. The perfect marriage of fantasy and reality, the co-existence of the poetic and the purely pictorial in a single gesture of paint—that is everywhere the miracle of Picasso, who was master of natural appearances in several idioms before he was twenty.

Against the processes of Cézanne which I have suggested, Picasso's approach would seem to be almost in reverse. His inspiration has an *immediacy* which must often overwhelm even *his* powers of lightning execution (his pictures are completed, as often as not, in one day if not in an hour) and comes ultimately from worlds of dream. The objects littering the studio, or drab metropolitan women, may set the ball rolling; but the landscape that he contemplates (in order to transform it) lies within; a region on the borderlands of consciousness itself. The process of transformation that he seeks seems, as I said, to be in the

reverse direction to Cézanne's. Cézanne, as it were, injected spiritual meaning into the exterior, daylight landscape; Picasso brings fragments of a spiritual landscape back into the light of day, provides them as best he can with cloaks made of material appearances, and labels the miracle 'Coffee-pot, candlestick and mirror' (see Plate 22). The presences which lurk beneath such familiar forms are invariably powerful. I do not sense the 'satanic', 'black-magic' element which some critics complain of; these strange animations of familiar, dead furniture have, rather, the effect of making us fall in love once more with our surroundings, which come alive, as in our childhood. Picasso's paintings have always an aura of that darkness from which they have been coaxed: they blink like owls in the sun, and all Day's creatures are a little scared.

But the measure of Picasso's genius lies not so much in his having the freedom of remote regions of mind and spirit as in his power to *materialize* his sense of what he finds there; to translate his intimations into the language of plastic reality, discovering for the one an identity in the other. Sickert said that poetry, pathos and sentiment in painting depend upon an ability to express plastic facts. We know that Sickert meant by this that the poetry that was implicit in a semi-theatrical 'scene' was carried, pictorially, upon the shoulders of the successful presentation of the plastic facts involved: you only got the pathos of the Old Bedford gallery and stalls *after* Sickert had made you aware of the 'plastic facts' of that theatre's interior, with occupants. *That* poetry would have been much the same if a photograph had supplied the plastic information. In Picasso, however, poetry, sentiment and plastic fact are fused into a unity which Sickert never dreamed of. By a special alchemy, Picasso creates plastic facts which give off poetry direct, for the simple reason that poetry was present at their conception, directly determining their plastic character. Picasso has a genius for inventing plastic constructions to the order of poetry. Anything that stirs in the whole kingdom of his consciousness may, sooner or later, translate itself into plastic terms. And the forms that are thus created, liberated, born free of previous systems will seem to us to be chaotic and meaningless until we suddenly feel those particular emotions which they were created to convey, and whose imprint on canvas they very simply are.

October 25, 1881, was the day on which Pablo Picasso was born at Malaga in Spain. His seventieth birthday was celebrated here in London

by the Institute of Contemporary Arts, who arranged an exhibition of seventy-seven of his drawings and watercolours at their gallery in Dover Street. These constituted a retrospective exhibition of a sort, for, despite certain gaps, they managed to range right through from a drawing made at the age of twelve (when Picasso was already an accomplished student at the School of Fine Arts in Corunna) to the present day. Those of his admirers who have long had recourse, in defending Picasso, to the argument that he had mastered many of the techniques of realism before he was out of his 'teens could now triumphantly direct the unbeliever to Dover Street. For there we not only found the drawing I have already mentioned, which, though remarkable for a boy so young, was not evidence so much of creative as of precocious academic powers; we were also confronted with two pen-and-ink drawings made two years later, at the age of fourteen. These were a great advance on the first—which was stiff and over-hard with a student's brilliance of pure mechanical observation, and showed no sign of an ability to *compose*. Yet precisely this power of composition now sprang into evidence with these two ink drawings, *Going to School* and *Waiting Her Turn*; and with it came a mode of observation far more intelligent than that embodied in the first, the prodigy's drawing. The author of the first might still have become an academic artist: the author of the others was already likely to attain the stature of, say, Fantin-Latour.

In his early work, Picasso was perilously near to becoming a mannerist as well as an expressionist—two not incompatible types of failure. And it seems to me that it was only the quiet intrusion of Degas, with his classical concern for form, that saved Picasso at this point and launched him on his first voyage of personal discovery in the famous Blue and Rose periods. The beggars and harlequins of 1903 and 1905 are certainly *drawn*, as opposed to painted; yet it is the continuous, calm, furry, plastic line of Degas, not the electric, spasmodic, broken-up, idiosyncratic line of Lautrec, which exploded only into cartoon-like caricature or vehement expressionism in the youthful Picasso's hands.

However, none of these early periods was stressed in this exhibition, although there was a foretaste in *Tavern in Barcelona* (1899) of what I mean here by 'expressionist'. I do not regret this lack of emphasis. The exquisite subtleties of the Blue or Rose periods were far from being revolutionary: they show us realism weakened, rather than revealed, by poetry. But a little later on, and poetry is seen creating a new

realism, in terms of its own choosing. But, once we have satisfied curiosity about the infant prodigy, we might as well move on to the invention of Cubism: and that is precisely what this exhibition did. In omitting the Blue and Rose periods it excluded works of great loveliness no doubt: but in these Picasso spoke still with the voice, or voices, of other artists. With Cubism, however, Picasso begins to speak with his own voice, in his own language—an entirely new language; and it is one he and his friends have succeeded in imposing upon the world. Indeed, his influence has been so profound, so all-pervasive, that we are by now almost unconscious even of its main characteristics. And, of course, Picasso's numerous excursions, his perpetual need for innovation and invention, not only on the level of subject-matter, of technique or even idiom, but on that of vision itself —all distract and prevent us from realizing the nature of the revolution. Picasso's exploratory impulse drives him to break all rules exactly as soon as he becomes conscious of rules to break: I believe this is essentially the disposition of the romantic artist; and Picasso certainly is that. His 'classical' periods are periods in which he parodies classical forms and formulae, making conscious those things of which his classical model was unconscious, and *vice-versa*. Nevertheless, there is a consistency about Picasso's inconsistencies. Although he changes gear, as it were, out of one idiom into another, not only *between* pictures but *within* them (so that even in drawing a single figure, a satyr or the *Minotaur*, his line 'changes gear' several times, passing from a detailed Breughelesque realism in the head to a chunky, near-Cubist treatment of arms and legs, perhaps, and thence to an Ingres-like torso) there is an overall rhythm in these changes which is itself recognizable.

Where is the identity in such diversity? What links have the magnificent *Minotaur* gouaches, for instance (which, incidentally, made their first appearance in public, anywhere, at this I.C.A. exhibition), with, say, *Bull*—a small segmented silhouette of an animal, triangular or hexagonal pieces filling out the dramatic mosaic of his body? The first, with their smoky, almost pastel, earth reds and sea blues; with their writhing, near-realist, baroque drawing which is only pinned firm by the ubiquitous and never-failing vertical lines of Picasso (in this case, the masts of ships, spears, cliff platforms, or other rigid stage properties); and the second, with its almost geometric segments of form, flatly dovetailing into this structural and expressive mosaic; no baroque swirl, no moth-eaten, pumice-stone, forms; everything hard, sharp, regular, flat. (It is a bull from the Antibes period of 1946, when

Picasso worked in a room in the Musée Grimaldi, directly overlooking the waves; and the bull's body contains within it, quite clearly, a rowing-boat, prow foremost.)

I think the only common feature in the most disparate examples of Picasso's art is the vital one common also to very many of the painters who are younger than he. It consists simply in this: the texture of the images employed is uneven, broken, fragmented. We do not read the various parts of the picture (in either the *Minotaur* series or in *Bull*) as we read them in Cézanne, Chardin, Tintoretto or Raphael, for instance. In such pre-Cubist painters this 'texture of images' is something that reads horizontally: that is, we pass smoothly—in 'reading' a portrait, for instance—from the chair to the arm, from the arm to the bosom and thence to the face, and so on, in a smooth progression. Signification exists horizontally (or vertically, or diagonally) *across the surface* of the picture, systematically building up the meaning of the whole for us. But in Picasso we tend to read the whole composition in a series of jerks; we tend to read each section of the design in comparative isolation from all the others: each is absorbed completely, then we hop to the next section. And it is a hop, out of one box into another—and not (as in nearly all pre-Cubist, but non-primitive painters) a glide. In the *Minotaur* series we hop from figure to figure, from image to image. In *Bull* we hop from one segment of the total image to another. Thus, if we may say that Cézanne or Raphael are read horizontally, Picasso or Braque are read vertically. Might a possible 'explanation' of this be that it reflects a change in the tempo of our sensory perceptions? Is our sensuous apprehension itself now apparent to our conscious minds in terms of a mass of fragmentary, arrested 'shots'; or, to pursue the analogy of the film, 'stills'? The realist in painting gazed long on the visual scene, until he could see it whole, and in terms of a smooth, unbroken continuous texture. The Cubist analysed this apparent unity of texture and found that it in fact consisted of a hundred separate facets, or separate and distinct moments of vision. He slowed down the film and found it was composed of single, static images. In looking at the film of reality Picasso's eye penetrates in a flash to the 'stills' of which it is composed. The fragmented facet of a form which he sees is in truth the total image which the eye and mind perceive in the moment of vision. The Cubist's facets are therefore more truly like reality than the realist's longhand version. For the longhand version is comprised entirely of shorthand notes welded into a synthetic 'whole'.

Curiously enough, this phenomenon of a 'fragmented vision', in which the 'fragmentary' facets of form are in fact the very means of itensifying vision, is less characteristic of the early years of Cubism proper (1907 to 1912) than it is of all the subsequent work of the two great masters whose entire output is as essentially 'Cubist' as their early revolutionary discovery—Picasso and Braque. Natural objects suffer a greater dislocation of their habitual anatomy or structure in the Picassos of 1944-45, let us say, than they did in the first Cézannesque 'Analytical Cubist' canvases of 1909, for instance. Indeed, the plastic construction of his forms—a woman, a man, or pears on a table—in 1909 now strikes one as having been remarkably calm, straightforward and, essentially, traditional. There is a large picture of a seated woman, painted in that year, which must be remembered by gallery-goers since it was exhibited prominently at the London Gallery in 1947; and again at the Zwemmer Gallery in 1948. It is entitled *Femme au Chignon*, and it is a very majestic construction indeed, calm, sharp, hard; the woman's figure is beautifully placed, or poised, in space; in fact, what I would call the spatial coherence of the composition is marvellously clear. The planes which the painter has insisted upon creating may buckle up the natural surfaces of the figure, but in this picture—and in contrast with certain other Picasso portraits of the same period that were on show at the time—we do still see these planes defining that figure and rendering it more and more distinct from the background. In many other portraits in his Analytical Cubist manner Picasso's planes serve to destroy the figure of the sitter and actually to confuse it with the background. But this *Femme au Chignon* has air flowing voluminously between herself and the marvellously flat and vacant wall behind her. Considering the extremely non-aerial nature of the colour in this picture, its beiges, yellowish brownish greys and blueish blacks, this evocation of air is remarkable. The actual brushwork has a lot to do with it: it is so expressive and varied in its touch and has a quality of pure plastic force not shared by many other pictures of the period, in which the planes are more wilful, and even brittle in suggestion. But *Femme au Chignon* also gains its invisible air—I mean the air we breathe—partly from the opposition of the empty wall behind and the horny angles of the face and head and the figure in front. In another portrait of this kind, the *Portrait of M. Uhde*, there is no air at all and no peace for the eye such as this wall (behind the *Femme au Chignon*) bestows. In this second portrait the planes have all flaked up and floated off M. Uhde, whom they cease to define with any consistency.

Thus one finds that, as Cubism progresses, the subject of a painting begins to disappear behind a storm of loose and floating planes, a head or a bust serving only as the matrix for these free elements. Now, since these liberated planes have ceased to be harnessed to the purposes of the definition of the form of the subject—and we might recall that Cézanne's planes were always utterly subservient to this end, and always defined the entire complex of forms—these free planes come to require a new guiding principle. In certain oval still lifes painted by Picasso at this time we begin to see the operation of such a principle, and it is one which I can only describe as being analogous to music. Realistic space—the space of scientific perspective—has here become so much confused that what we have left is a sort of visual music: space-notes in consort; an abstract dance by no means entirely devoid of space, nor of hints of the subject—but they are only hints: and it is space of a sort that we apprehend tangibly (with our whole bodies) every bit as much as visually.

If ever there was a moment in the history of art when it looked as though artists had merged their individual identities in a movement, these early years of Cubism would seem to be a case in point. Yet was this really so? Is it not still true that art never comes out of 'movements'; only out of individual artists? A movement may legitimately be said to exist when there are a number of obvious overlappings between the works of a number of individuals. Picasso and Braque had certain aspirations in common in the years between 1908 and 1912; but the creation of a movement was surely not one of them. To an onlooker at the time their canvases must have appeared as almost identical. Yet as the years go by and one looks back at the early Cubist paintings one is increasingly impressed by the dissimilarities between the Braques and the Picassos. Then as now Picasso strained the formal vehicle of expression to the very limit, to the point beyond which formal organization would crack and disintegrate into chaos: the sense of drama which invests everything he has done springs more from the fact that his daring prompts him to load every form with the utmost meaning of a non-formal, poetic nature than from anything else. Hence the frequent sensation that the painting itself has been almost ignored; that his attention was fixed so exclusively on what one might call the invisible content of his work that he could afford to give only the briefest consideration to the pictorial economy itself—to such matters

as colour, form and design! Then as now, Braque, in complete contrast to Picasso, strives after a refinement, a quiet advancement of the means of painting. A new development in the language of colour and form (upon an impregnable basis) has been his achievement. Untroubled by a Picassian ambition to find a pictorial equivalent for *every* experience of mind or spirit, Braque has limited his subject-matter. The most commonplace objects of daily life furnish him with the material for his feats in visual transformation. While speed is the essence of Picasso's vision (and a lightning execution alone could record it), Braque's art is a glorious vindication of slowness. Only those images that return perpetually to his contemplative eye, only those versions of reality that continually interpose themselves between him and the objects and persons he knows and looks at, are good enough for Braque. Again, while Picasso imposes meanings of his own upon a coffee-pot or a glass with five little flowers arranged in it, so that we feel that *they* are being made to serve *his* metaphysical purposes, Braque seems to put himself at the service of his subjects. A Picasso coffee-pot is in many ways just another self-portrait; but, as I have remarked elsewhere, a Braque jug comes near to having a soul of its own. Braque animates inanimate objects. Perhaps this is just as true of Picasso: yet there is a vital difference, and I think it is this: while a Braque jug and a Picasso candlestick show equal degrees of animistic life, the Braque jug appears independent; it has a life of its own which seems independent of its creator, while the Picasso object—whatever it is—says 'Picasso!' Picasso himself in person looks out at us from behind the candlestick or vase, which is only a gay mask. Those big black Catalonian eyes stare out at us from behind the object-mask!

This is no longer true, however, when the object depicted by Picasso is not a lifeless, inanimate thing but a living creature—a bird, goat or frog. For the full repertory of Picassian birds and beasts we must turn to his lithographic drawings; and in particular to his illustrations for the Comte de Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*. Such cocks, such bullfrogs, cats and dogs never before existed on white paper. Utterly at home in lithography, Picasso in recent years recapitulates, in a host of wonderful drawings, many new themes and subjects as well as all his usual ones: nudes; portraits of girls; still life, perhaps a few flowers in a jar set against a mirror with a heavy frame, or a coffee-pot with a skull on an open Bible; and so on. And, in lithographs he made between 1945 and 1947 there were again new arrivals: a little owl had fluttered down and perched among the familiar studio properties—and it

happened to be a real one, though its image was not more *alive* than all those inanimate objects which Picasso endows each with its own personality, a quality which is exciting in a mere 'object'. Perched on one of the knobs of the usual Picasso chair-back, this owl, a little old box of a bird, stares out at Picasso—and us. It seems in itself a symbol of the artist, and particularly of his work in recent years: for it is a sort of ambassador of the Dark, of the vast netherworld which psychologists call the Unconscious. It blinks in the unfamiliar light of day.

What distinguishes Picasso's post-war works more than ever before is a spiritual or metaphysical quality. It is curious that this rarely alarms us; though he makes us follow to the strangest (and often very terrifying) places, we feel increasingly at home in the spiritual landscape to which he admits us. Many of the greatest artists make us acquainted with a new Reality. It is not infrequently a Hell of some kind. But such artists, being explorers not inventors, can introduce us only to that which exists, which is real and which we shall therefore, in some way, be able to accept. Once such a new world of the imagination is recognized or accepted we begin to find new beauties in the presentation of the themes deriving from it. Picasso and T. S. Eliot are both giant creators: both have made a new world; and we find that these worlds of theirs increasingly resemble the one we live in. Does artistic creation of this order transcend aesthetics? Certainly a new aesthetic and new criteria invariably form in the wake of such achievement, which in itself is possibly of another order. Or does some aesthetic comprehend every form of expression possible to man?

Other newcomers in Picasso's post-war lithographs are the turtle-doves and pigeons. The softness and featheriness of the pigeons in some of these lithographs is quite remarkable: a rapid stabbing and spluttering of a large brush—and there's the bird, ready to take off with a flap and a cluck. Every conceivable variety of texture is to be found among these drawings. Whether it is a line, blob, scratch or stipple, there is never the slightest suggestion that the ends and the means are not in fact identical: every black or grey mark is magnificently itself—and a lot of other things at the same time: a feather, a claw, an eye. Among the inmates of Picasso's lithographic aviary there is, of course, that famous creature—the Dove of Peace, which is, at least in the original lithograph, by no means 'like a snapshot of a wood-pigeon, at first glance,' as Mr. Clive Bell declared in *The New Statesman*

and Nation. Like everything else by Picasso, the bird has alighted on the shores of our visible world after a flight, at the speed of light, straight out of the heart of a metaphysical imagination. Because his brain has stored away every texture and every trick of natural appearances, Picasso's creatures materialize amid a dazzling display of effects. Feathersoftness being one such effect, a natural quality he has observed and stored away in his magazine, it has come out with a soft explosion when he thought the thought, 'Dove!' This Dove is conceived, not in ink or chalk, but in something ideal—in short, it is created out of *feathersoftness*! It was always like this with Picasso: the least earthbound or pedestrian, the most visionary and possessed of painters, he always by-passes mere appearances. Where some moderns have been able to manipulate, as it were, the texture of visual appearances, so that they took on a new interest and vitality, Picasso has given us new versions of the objects themselves—the things behind the appearances. Thus his creativeness operates beyond the visual realm. He succeeds, as I have already suggested, in expressing not only our reaction to the visual aspect of a thing, but our total experience of it, through every sense, and with every faculty. It is therefore quite inadequate merely to discuss the pictorial mechanics of his works, brilliant, resourceful and overwhelmingly convincing though they almost invariably are.

There is no formula for bestowing all this *meaning*, all this *significance* upon relatively meaningless and insignificant objects and situations. Only a creative imagination can revivify an object which we normally regard as dead or commonplace. The process in Picasso's case would almost justify the adjective 'anthropomorphic'. He awakens the dull, static properties by which we are surrounded in our daily lives, and makes them dance and perform as potently and hypnotically as an African war mask performs. Take his kitchen interiors of 1944-46. Gas stoves grin; a meat-safe nods or winks from the wall; a mirror closes its eyes or goes blank and expressionless like deep water, in response to the artist's questioning eye; flowers wave their petal fingers at him; the coffee-grinder, squatting on the kitchen shelf, pretends to be Picasso's pet owl; and the little owl itself pretends in turn to be a little clock or a money-box; a candle or an unlit lamp pines away in the heat of a Provençal afternoon in the company of huge unsympathetic poppies; a coffee-pot gesticulates, remonstrating—or makes advances to a milk jug; in the purple shadows of night the kitchen table heaves

its chest up and down rhythmically like a sleeper snoring, and the twittering wine-glasses are kept awake.

Picasso, you will observe, imposes his own will, his own fantasy, upon the world of domestic furniture. He *uses* a basket with a few stems of ripe corn and some more poppies, or a girl with a bicycle, or a hill-top crested with Provençal roofs, or a reclining nude with a pointed head *for his own purpose exclusively*. All these things and many others—palm trees, cacti, goats, centaurs or marigolds in a jar—are blown sideways and sucked up in the great whirlwind of the Picassian dream. In an exhibition of sixty pictures which I saw in July 1949, at La Maison de la Pensée Française in Paris, the paint was thicker, the colour gayer, than anything he had painted since before *Guernica*. Clearly the inspiration of this new *joie de vivre* was his new family. In 1947 he had married a young wife (the painter, Françoise Gilot) and, settling at Vallauris, had begun a new family life. In these new pictures babies grab toys and scuttle across behind the bars of high chairs or a pen; the young wife of the artist is herself figured by means of stripy forms tumbled together like a pile of nursery picture bricks; brightest colours alternate in the stripes, and the forms are less solid, less dense than often hitherto. But they are more ideographic in their jazz-like sparkle and wit. And by this word 'ideographic' I mean, very briefly, any formal image which does not directly evoke the illusion of a solid form in space. To evoke such solidity the artist must use a plastic image. But there are other, non-plastic qualities which may be suggested by a flatter sort of image —an ideographic image; an image which we *read* rather than *feel*. And this is the kind of image that predominates in these gay paintings made between 1947 and 1949. Surmounting the rough and tumble of the brightly coloured, sharp, stripy shapes which are her body and limbs, the head of Picasso's wife shone out very simply and realistically from this agitated canvas. It was insulated from the current that set the whole picture jangling, by a simple witty device: Picasso had drawn the charming face in a few black lines on a white ground, and thus made of it a separate formal unit. It looked at first as though a drawing of a girl's head by Matisse, done on a piece of white paper, had been pinned over the place where the head in Picasso's portrait should be. But the square white patch with the drawing in it was of course only the white, primed canvas itself.

On the whole these later Picassos were exciting rather than satisfying; stimulating mentally—in conception—but disappointing sensuously—considered, that is, as objects in themselves which should

give pleasure. Picasso still blows everything sideways: yet, in his creative haste he seemed to have become more impatient with the means of painting than ever before; and this was not a good sign, I thought. As I have said, these pictures—exhibited in Paris in 1949—were more ideographic than plastic. And a writhing line, like coils of thin rope or string, was beginning to appear in them. But the final evolution of this linear preoccupation, was first seen (as far as an English audience was concerned) in a colour photograph of Picasso's studio at Vallauris which appeared in *Picture Post* on June 24, 1950. In that photograph the long picture (Plate 26) on the easel was the one to look at. The subject seemed to be two girls lying on the grass by an inlet of the sea. The lines which created the wildly looping forms of this composition were white. If one knew the white sharp marble rocks that the waves at Antibes carve out into sharp concave surfaces, large and small, one might have begun to feel that these rocks had largely determined the shape and quality of all the formal segments in the two figures. They had also determined those in the dark rocks that fringed the top of the picture beyond a tongue of the white swirling sea. Although painted at Vallauris near Antibes, in 1950, this picture is named *Les Demoiselles des Bords de la Seine*, and is 'after' Courbet. (So for *sea* we should perhaps see *river*.)

This excellent painting is thus rather more recent than anything I had seen in Paris in 1949; and it was much more of a real achievement. The sixty odd pictures in the Paris exhibition were little more, I remember feeling, than a translation of the drab, grey, terrifying wartime idiom into terms of gay colour. But it must be said it was rather a desperate sort of gaiety: despite the changes, the essential vision was the same as in those gaunt wartime canvases of terrified women. But this long picture, *Les Demoiselles des Bords de la Seine*, was new: it represented, as far as Picasso is concerned, the defeat of the plastic by the ideographic. The illusion of physical space is at a minimum in the flat loopings of that coiling white line.

The prelude to this ideographic period (as I call it) of family portraits—and many other things as well, of course, including his venture into ceramics—was a long visit, soon after the war, to Antibes, where he gained entry into the ancient castle of the Grimaldi. Known as the Musée Grimaldi, this largely empty museum (a small collection of spears and some fragments of Greco-Roman masonry appear to have been almost its sole contents), this old tower, rises on

the ramparts twenty yards from the sea and, with the church, dominates the surrounding huddle of the old town. Some magnificent bare rooms, from which one looks down on the roofs, or out to sea, or across to the Alpes Maritimes, struck Picasso as an ideal studio. Here he worked (permission finally being granted) throughout 1946: and since he has bequeathed many of the large paintings he made there to the Musée, one now has the most satisfactory experience of enjoying pictures in the very room where they were conceived.

In all these paintings, drawings and lithographs, made in the Musée Grimaldi at Antibes, it is Antipolis rather than Antibes that inspires Picasso. Antipolis *through* Antibes. Only in the oil-on-paper still lifes does the present oust the mythical past of the Greek settlement; aubergines, lemons, a bouquet of small red flowers (soft scarlet explosions) and the prickly sea-urchins being exchanged for centaurs and fauns, ochre and white rocks underfoot, and the black jagged crags of alpine foothills for a backcloth to their play. Except—again—for the still lifes, which are essentially conceived as plastic colour conveyed in the immensely simple but space-evoking scribble of a big brush, the Antibes works are remarkable for their dependence upon line. And line, whenever Picasso is the artist, is always the vehicle of wit—as well, of course, as of a hundred other things. Useless to analyse at this point the baffling fusion of qualities which he displays in any single statement: whenever he is linear he is *also* plastic; whenever he is most illustrative (as in a large number of terribly funny drawings of Bacchanalian goings on which he made at this time) he is *also* most architectonic and abstract: and so on. For instance, there is a drawing called *Dances and Games* (1946), which is a flashing storm of grey, white and black triangular and circular shapes *if we look at it as a pictorial structure*: but we have only to look *through* the triangles at the two centaurs entertaining the nude dancing lady who shakes a tambourine over her head, to become engrossed in 'the story', enchanted by antics that call forth a response from the depths of our nature, since they are indeed archetypes of fantasy, embedded in mythology.

As always, Picasso plumbs the depths, whether by way of a handful of *oursins* and aubergines or by making Pan dance on the Mediterranean shore. The sharpness of these drawings and their lightweight quality as 'painting' contrast with the solid oil-on-canvas or oil-on-hardboard works in the permanent Picasso collection at the Musée Grimaldi. As an example of this, though not in the Musée, I can think

for instance of a superbly luminous and firm still life *A Skull and Sea-urchins* (1947). Then, there are the large panels he did at Antibes of satyrs and centaurs, using nothing more than a dirty white scumbled ground into which, while it was wet, he had drawn his centaurs with a single line of splintering, spluttering charcoal. Again he presents, with brilliant economy, the familiar airless grouping of sharp and hard images which are in effect supernatural presences.

It was at this time that Picasso turned his hand to the decoration of ceramics. His pottery must probably be judged, in the end, in relation not to any other pottery but to his own painting; it is not so much an exercise in ceramic art as a spilling over of pictorial and sculptural energies into clays and glazes. He violates the anciently established laws of ceramic art; these pots extend the range, not of pottery but of painting. The clay ends up as a typical Picassian statement rather than as a vessel to which any sort of physical usefulness may be attributed. And 'physical use' is for pottery what pure expressiveness, or communication, is for painting: it is the main condition of its very existence, and therefore the prime arbiter of its form. Perhaps for this very reason the most exciting of Picasso's ceramics are not his vases or plates but those female figures which he has created by crumpling, twisting and pulling an ordinary slim vase, thrown for him and still wet from the throwing, into the semblance of body and limbs: his own phrase for such pieces is 'woman vase'. But equally satisfactory are such things as *The Condor Vase* or *The Goat Vase*, because these are not pots but ceramic sculpture. Or again there is the superb *Still Life on a Sphere*; which is simply a sealed sphere, in form, decorated with still-life shapes in a linear idiom. *The Condor Vase*, based I think on a traditional Provençal vessel, *could* hold a liquid which, on pouring, would issue from the bird's beak; but the *Sphere* is only a sphere. In this category there are also numerous owls: his owls are an egg, big end up, balanced at 45 degrees on a base with painted claws. In his decorated plates and dishes he has found most scope for his pictorial genius, for here the crude clay platter is the merest excuse for any number of designs: still life, bull in bullring, landscape, portrait head, dance of nudes with centaurs—and so on. Gouging the clay mercilessly, heaping glazes or other clays on in mounds, the final surfaces of his 'plates' are as unsmooth as a contour map executed in relief. Humour is ever-present: I recall a plate with a still-life design in yellow and brown, I think, which was named *Black Pudding and Eggs*, 1948. In fact, it was, it seemed to me, a *portrait*—of Picasso's friend Jaime Sabartès. Very

occasionally he has produced a pot, a mere vessel—which is not also an owl or vulture—which is handsome in form (as distinct from *expressive*, even *grotesque*). Some jugs, for instance—very like the jugs in Braque's 1942-45 still lifes, incidentally—which he has decorated beautifully with dark brown centaurs, dancing; one calligraphic brush-stroke for each limb.

Picasso's final phase to date (I write in the summer of 1953) was revealed in a remarkable exhibition at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome in May 1953. For this exhibition the Galleria had borrowed from Picasso nearly two hundred and fifty of his own works from his own collection at Vallauris: and these had been mounted, there in Rome, in a mighty display culminating in his latest and largest works, the immense twin murals of *War* and *Peace*. Completed only in the autumn of 1952, these are Picasso's greatest work since *Guernica*. To begin with, they are each approximately fifteen feet high and thirty-three feet long (*Guernica* was 11 ft. 6 in. by 25 ft. 8 in.). They had been designed for a site at Vallauris; so this was likely to be the last as well as the first time that they would be seen elsewhere. The exhibition was to be returned to the impatient artist at Vallauris after only one other port of call, Milan. Incidentally, the Galleria's arrangement of all this dynamite included a novelty that is worth describing. The pictures did not hang *on* the walls; but in front of them. A thin vertical strut was held by a bracket about eighteen inches in front of the wall: the picture was then fixed to the strut and finally swivelled round a little, to right or left, so that it was no longer parallel to the wall-surface, or to the other adjacent canvases. The result was that you only *faced* one picture at a time, instead of a wall full: and the pictures hovered in space. Also, each frameless canvas (they had slender baguettes) became an object in space—thus according in practice with the old Cubist criterion, the demand that the picture become a created, solid object-in-itself.

I cannot begin to describe this remarkable exhibition with any justice. The immense impact of this great artist was as electric as ever; and I say this despite the fact that I had seen perhaps half the paintings before, in London or Paris (or in reproduction). To see what Picasso had kept back for himself was extremely interesting, of course. For instance, he seemed on the whole to have wanted to hang on to the less, rather than the more, 'completed' works: the canvases that contained, let us say, emotion in the raw, rather than those in which

expression was so complete and final that, despite subject, or violence of feeling, the pure tranquillity of a form perfected had descended upon the whole. He had kept the white-hot projection of vision, however sketchy; he had sold the picture whose problem was resolved and which was therefore bestowed with the permanence of 'good painting' —the calm permanence Braque so much more often achieves. For himself Picasso had retained the inventive blueprint, idea-laden; he had relinquished the (rarer) perfected object. And in doing this he had possibly confirmed the argument that goes: Picasso is even more of an inventive genius than a painter. His thousand and one discoveries have fertilized the imaginative seed of an epoch. He is *the* genius of our age. Yet possibly he is not its greatest painter.

I do not want to be misunderstood about this. As a painter I know that no one can impel me to work as Picasso can. Simply to see a fine example of his work affects one's very glands. But this wears off: and one is left with a picture which has discharged all its meaning too quickly and too violently, and has become empty; with nothing left over to yield to a more contemplative study. This happens far more often with Picasso than with Braque, Bonnard or even with Matisse, all of whom continue to disclose their wealth long after the first assault of their canvases upon us. Of course, Picasso's pictures, like batteries re-charged, become electric again with disuse; and then, again, one is susceptible once more to the shock.

In meaning and appearance the *War* and *Peace* (Plates 24 and 23) are very different from *Guernica*. In *War* three dark horses draw a 'hideous' black chariot across towards the left, where a 'fearless' male nude confronts them (their hooves pound a blazing book) with the Scales of Justice and a white, papery shield bearing a line-drawing of a dove. Six dark grey, flat, shadow-silhouettes of grotesque and hacking warriors mound up in a row behind the horses, and the chariot bears another male nude, this time with horns, a dripping sword and a transparent sack full of skulls. His left hand holds a white disc, out of which seem to spring a number of immense germs. There is thus an element of the Picassian humour even in this scheme; certainly the brutal urgency, the almost too-real horror of *Guernica* is absent. For one thing the imagery of *War* invokes ancient myth rather than bloody reality, despite a blood-red ground-plane on the right-hand side of the painting. For another, the pictorial nature of that imagery is much further removed from the original Cubist fragmentation of forms than that of *Guernica*. Not only are *War*'s figures intact

as figures; they are also grouped more conventionally; that is, they are arranged in a foreground against an atmospheric background of cloudy vapours. *Guernica* by contrast confuses 'foreground' with 'background' throughout—intentionally, and brilliantly, of course; its figures are strung out across the picture surface and *at* the surface, evenly, from corner to corner; and everything is conveyed in Picasso's crystalline, almost geometric formal vocabulary. The cloudy upper areas of *War* are occasionally invaded by a straight dividing line, separating an area of grey-blue from one of green: but here, in the loose fuzzy scumbling of large areas, is a possible weakness; these loose clouds of colour are a little vague, arbitrary. The colours themselves are highly dramatic, but gay, despite the prevailing crimsons, blacks, purples and bitter greens. Except for two wonderfully three-dimensional hands, which emerge, armless, from a black pit under the chariot wheels (wheels too much stylized into lopsidedness, like the set in the film about Dr. Caligari's cabinet?), there is an almost poster-like thinness about many of these images. Yet this may possibly itself prove a virtue in the end, in view of the scale of the work. One cannot tell until one sees it in its intended setting. The Sistine ceiling figures might appear inflated at close quarters.

Peace is far quieter in colour than *War*, broader in its main dispositions and more serene and measured in its drawing. Never, incidentally, has Picasso been so influenced by Matisse as here (in fact, his work of these two years—1952 and 1953—to judge by a roomful in this exhibition, shows a Matisse-like preoccupation with serene line; 'empty', clear, brilliant, thinly painted colour; and gaiety of theme—family life, mostly). Indeed, the nude family group which occupies the bottom right-hand corner of *Peace* contains a sitting figure which might almost have come straight from an early Matisse of 1906-7; such as *The Joy of Life* or *Luxe, Calme et Volupté*. But it is more expressive psychologically, as well as having more powerful plastic implications, and being more excitingly related to all the other nude figures in the picture than were the figures in *The Joy of Life*. I make the comparison to indicate the sort of linear idiom Picasso has used—thick lines describing figures against a ground of a single colour; the figures filled in, roughly speaking, in one pale, whitish colour-tone. In the centre foreground a white, winged horse pulls a plough, driven by a child. Nude women dance, frieze-like, across a blue ground: a goldfish bowl (tremendously Matisse!) full of birds and a bird-cage full of fish float in the air to the sound of a satyr's pipes. Picasso dances and exults.

Less formally inventive than *Guernica*, *War* and *Peace* are nonetheless majestic.

In his old age Picasso is rounding off his titanic efforts with works which, if they lack some of the tension of earlier periods, have possibly a warmer humanity.

8

PIERRE BONNARD AND ABSTRACTION

It seems to me that the immense influence which Pablo Picasso has exerted on the art of our times ceased to act directly on painters in France (but not outside France) round about 1946 or 1947. By 1950 hardly one among the most important painters in Paris under fifty showed signs of that influence. The various new schools of non-figurative painting were by then in the ascendant and their leading exponents seemed, in so far as they were influenced at all by the preceding generation of 'Old Masters', to be finding Matisse and Bonnard more to their liking than Picasso or Braque. Estève, Singier, Manessier, or such very young artists as Rezvani and Arnal, all owe much to the abstract elements in Pierre Bonnard. So, when we regard Bonnard solely in the context of twentieth-century painting; even, that is, if we study him with eyes accustomed to the lens that is Picasso, we shall not make the mistake of assigning him to the Past: we shall not look upon him as an intruder into the Present from the Impressionist Nineties; as the final ambassador of an anachronism. He is nothing of the kind. Vital creative powers such as Bonnard possessed do not have to arrive at Cubism because the year is 1908, or at Surrealism because it is 1925; they do not have to have registered, in the first instance, the neglect and, virtually, suppression of the subject in the interests of form; and in the second, the total neglect of form in the interests of the presentation of the most subjective of all possible subjects. It was always open to men of such powers to take a hint from tradition and to seek to balance these things, which are familiar ingredients of many pictorial mixtures, in a manner conducive to total

harmony; to the end of an equilibrium, within the work, of all known or conceivable qualities. Or again, we are not obliged to concede that Picasso's numerous and varied habits—his preoccupation with anguish and the more obvious and violently manifested forms of emotion, for instance; or his perennial tendency to sharpen all forms—necessarily constitute the sole valid prototype for the paintings of the present age. It is true that neither the suffering nor the angularity could have been integral to the painting of any epoch but our own, at any rate in the form in which they appear in Picasso. Picasso is a great artist and these things have not been fabricated: rather they have been sucked in from contemporary air and distilled; they are genuinely essences from the spiritual Present, and, though I do not know what it is they portend, they must certainly be regarded as portents of some kind. Picasso is 'contemporary': nobody doubts that. But if 'contemporary' as an adjective applied to painting is somehow held to denote vital excellence —the vitality of the really new: the excellence of a practitioner of the foremost powers—then Bonnard was 'contemporary' right into his eightieth year. The 'really new' can never be exhausted, not even by Picasso. To the end of his life Bonnard found plenty of new problems to investigate, new situations to exploit.

Of course, he did bring a few nineteenth-century trappings along with him; but only because they continued to supply delight and actually to assist him, continuously, in his vital purposes. He clung to no paraphernalia of any kind, mental or physical, for the protective nostalgia it might afford. Every device and habit that he allowed to persist, along into the endlessly changing Present, will be found to have only an apparent, a superficial identification with 'periods' of an earlier date. It was because they continued to supply the key to the potential and the unexplored that he retained them. Thus his subjects may have preserved a nineteenth-century flavour (though did not his pictures include motor-cars, as well as recording the latest tastes in women's clothes? I think that the hats and skirts on Bonnard's ladies again and again are a record of fashion in the 'twenties); but the painting of them, the design they inspired, was always unforeseeably novel and surprising.

Painting has many levels of realization. If our sensibility is such that our penetration to the deeper levels is precluded, we shall not only *not* understand when these levels are referred to by the critic; we may even confuse what is meant with the kind of meaning that pertains to the shallower or more accessible levels. Doubtless someone has already

suggested the analogy existing between pictures and onions. With onions the exterior casing is the first layer to meet the eye and, therefore, not only is it the easiest of apprehension, but, until it is peeled off, it remains the only thing to be apprehended. In pictures this first layer is *appearances*; the literary meaning; the specific reference to, and evocation of, particular physical objects, which bring in their immediate train a host of associations, a whole web of associative emotion. But this first layer of a picture's meaning is only the first from the point of view of the uninitiated. For those who are familiar with the deeper layers the process is more or less reversed; for them the abstract formal music of the core is more immediately apprehended and enjoyed than any 'subject' that such abstract symphonies may hinge upon. 'Subjects' are nevertheless integral to the whole process, and Bonnard's choice of subject, instinctive though it always was, will have earned him the scorn of any who believe in the possibility of art having a specifically social meaning. There is much of social relevance in Bonnard: but the connection is oblique and we certainly cannot decipher any political meaning from his instinctive and profound treatment of his subjects. We see a lady, in a hat that dates, dreamily fingering a crumb at the edge of the tablecloth: disarranged cups and saucers, and plates only partially covered with things to eat—these make their own suggestion (whether suffused with the yellow of lamplight or saturated with the blue light of day) of a moment that is utterly familiar to us. It is the quiet at the end of a meal; that lapse between two kinds of activity which makes the leisured rhythm that denotes order in daily living: a moment that is almost the epitome of civilized life in the West. If this moment, which Bonnard in his pictures has given us over and over again, is felt already to be colouring with something we call sentimentality (meaning perhaps unreality), I can only think that it is the 1947[1] side of the window-pane of Time that distorts, or is dirty. It is our misfortune, not his.

Those who regard Bonnard's painting as somehow uncontemporary cannot be looking very much deeper than this first layer of meaning, which is the least pictorial in the purest sense, being the layer at which objects and events that are not intrinsic to the painting as such, are evoked or suggested or, as an earlier generation of critics would have put it, 'portrayed'. They are looking at Madame Bonnard and her hat and thinking of hats or women. But when I suggest that a contempla-

[1] Most of this essay was written in the month after Bonnard died—but has not been published hitherto. P. H.

tion of the painting which penetrates below this hat-level, or level of exterior appearances, reveals something more abstract; and when I say that the nature of whatever it is that we enjoy at the deeper levels can best be indicated by a reference to music, which is comprised of abstract components, I may seem to be asserting the absolute and exclusive validity of abstract form. I can only repeat my belief that that which we finally value most in painting is what I must call the *abstract music of interacting form-colour*. But I must add that such 'music' bears reference at every point to particular substance; to the actual objects which the painter had to scrutinize in order that any such formal configuration might suggest itself to him. If it is abstract, it is nonetheless saturated with the quality of things; even of particular things. It is therefore to be distinguished from the consciously sought Abstract product of the present day, which is synthetic in the sense that it is the result of direct, conscious seeking on the part of intelligence and will rather than an operation of the whole semi-conscious aesthetic faculty—of the whole sensibility. Piet Mondrian's *intention* was the attainment of ordered nothingness, the perfect aesthetic disposition of the minimal material. I cast no slight: Mondrian's was an exceedingly refined and delicate activity, and is, in any case, a most notable achievement.

But what I wish to describe is the abstract element underlying the more powerful forms of realism. For instance, we might consider the painting of Velasquez from this standpoint—a form of painting which might seem to have been the result (on the technical level) of a preoccupation with the most precise and faithful reproduction of those objects or persons, meticulously grouped, which lay, in fact, before the painter's eye. What is abstract about the carefully moulded features in a Velasquez portrait—egg-like, always, in the rhythm of their contours, in the actual pattern of their concavities and convexities—and about the blunt-fish shapes of the folds of drapery, is their weight, their realized density, their movement or thrust, and their *approximate* shape. Colour too, of course, is 'abstract' in its appeal: such at any rate is its most advanced and proper use, but I rather think Velasquez's weakness is in respect of colour. Before his works we are too often in a position to say that our awareness of the forms and our awareness of their colour (not only *their* colour, but the colour of the pigment which evokes and defines them) are not completely identified in a single comprehension, as is the case with Cézanne. But of his form: one feels, I think, that Velasquez is *concealing* purely abstract shapes—egg-forms

and fish-forms—just *under* the surface of his subjects, whether human or inanimate.

Now, every great painter has his own variety of abstract shapes thus concealed—and often only just concealed—beneath his more or less naturalistic compromise with appearances, beneath a finish that is 'like'. Cézanne, as might be guessed, saw 'the cube, the cone and the cylinder' behind every appearance, as well as a more rectilinear configuration. With Velasquez it was eggs and fish everywhere, while Picasso, before he came out into the open with them, was forever stuffing flat triangles, of many shapes and sizes, under the surface of all the things he painted, whether they were beggars (in which case their emaciate and crinkly skins were stretched taut from sharp point to point of the triangles within) or mountains, horses or apples (an apple came to resemble a sort of solid star). Triangles still dominate him to-day, but now it is the subject for which we must look amongst the triangles: a woman's head is not infrequently sensed lurking somewhere within or behind a single and quite unadulterated triangle, and any rectangular feature, such as a table-top, is invariably susceptible to a dramatic diagonal split. In another painter connected with Spain, El Greco, we may always perceive solid diamond forms, usually vertically inclined, underlying superficial definitions. The limbs of his saints are infested by such sharp crystal forms; they lie along them, like fish swimming upstream. Rubens on the other hand has endless spheres, half-spheres and forms that resemble the segments of an orange—solid crescents—tossing about under the miraculous texture and flourish of his final surfaces.

Perhaps all this makes more apparent what I mean when I say that *the kind* of abstraction one finds in painting is partly determined by the kind of subject that is involved; and so by the nature of the 'appearances' to which the abstract must be wedded. The relation that the centre and the skin of an onion bear to one another is anything but arbitrary: *organic*, though overworked as a metaphor nowadays, is nevertheless the best word to suggest the interactive relationship of all the parts and ingredients of a painting. The interaction of the abstract element and the element of realistic representation of 'appearances', might be set down in the following manner: we might say that the artist's subjective impulse is towards the creation of the purely abstract, on the one hand: while on the other, he has to reckon with the objective nature, the actual appearance of whatever he is painting. The two things pull in different directions. One of the tensions which the

painter experiences in moments of creative effort is the tension involved in establishing these two impulses in a state of balance.

Painting should evolve this equilibrium, this balance of inner and outer; indeed, the painted picture should *be* the equilibrium.

I think I would even say that if the impulse to create abstract form is not opposed and retarded by an insistent contemplation of exterior reality; if the painter, that is, concedes unbridled expression to any single set of impulses at the expense of another set (ceasing to force them to come to terms with, or find their outlet through, manifestations of an opposite nature), we shall have the sense that his work was too easy—or rather, such work is boring: it involves repetition. Soutine is a case of such a subjective outpouring: a spate of furious scribble, the abstract vitality of which is not disciplined by new and continuous apprehension of the visible, exterior world. This leads to a conclusion. If that objective relation with phenomena which the discipline of *observation* establishes for a painter is not sufficiently strong; then subjectivity will lead to abstraction and abstraction of a kind that will only yield monotonous repetition.

But the requisite tension may be relaxed by an opposite failure. We may feel, to take a different example, that the art of Monet resolved this struggle between inner and outer too much in favour of the latter; and this was implied by Cézanne when he said, 'Monet is only an eye' (adding, however, 'But *what* an eye!'). The criticism here being that Monet's painting was primarily a superlative record of objective visual sensation, and was too little concerned to translate that sensation into terms of aesthetic emotion. In writing about Bonnard I feel a necessity to emphasize the character of his subjective, abstract design, the underlying abstract 'music'. I feel this because his pictures' reference to the external world of everyday reality is, for most people, it seems, their most obvious aspect.

I think we may best conceive this underlying abstract rhythm in Bonnard if we think of a piece of large-scale fish-net drawn over the surface of the canvas: it is through an imaginary structure of loose, connected squares—sometimes pulled into oblongs and sometimes into diamond shapes—that Bonnard seems to look at his subject. I'm not suggesting that he makes a conscious mental manœuvre of this kind—my image of the netting is simply a device for interpreting Bonnard's mode of vision, which was unique. His paintings have a visual alloverness, an evenness of emphasis and handling which are more reminiscent, as isolated qualities, of the vision of the perceptual Monet than of the

more conceptual Renoir. But these qualities in Bonnard are not isolated; and, altogether, he is far nearer Renoir than Monet. On the whole we cannot class Bonnard as a conceptual, as against a perceptual painter; nor is the truth the other way round. He forged a conceptual imagery out of perceptions. His form is very powerful; but it is distinct from the form of Renoir in that it is developed entirely in terms of this 'alloverness'. Renoir developed the forms of the various objects in his composition more or less separately: that is, sculpturally. The beauty of form of a head, a breast or an arm, or of tree trunks, or fruit, in a Renoir picture, is something we can contemplate in ignorance of the rest of the canvas: each object has its own self-centred perfection of form—which is a sculptural form. But the form of the objects in a picture by Bonnard hardly exists in isolation from the total configuration. In feeling the force of the form of a head we find we are reading a passage which includes the adjacent planes of floor and wall, as well as some formal accent of particular strength in the shoulder of the figure, and perhaps another in the chair-back. Form in Bonnard is more essentially pictorial than it is even in Renoir, for whom a picture was an arrangement of solid, rotund, sculptural, separate forms. Indeed, Bonnard's forms have an apparent flatness: the masses of his forms seem flattened so as to display the largest area or plane to the spectator. But this flattening is somehow itself the very agent of spatial realization: in fact, we come to recognize that the flatter the masses of face or hair, or of the bush outside the window, may seem in themselves, the more profound is the spatial scheme to which, in total concourse, they contribute. In spite of the clearest *rapport* with the picture surface at every stage, every element makes its contribution to a configuration in space: the imaginary fish-net at the surface, at one extreme, and perspectival depth at the other, between them provide the poles of definition. Thus we find a sort of up-ending of all receding planes: there is a tendency for them to expand and rear up just where perspective tells them to lie down, diminish and contract. If we think of this invisible skeleton of rectilinear surface design (the fish-net) as being the real formal theme of a picture whose subject is the receding planes of the walls and floor of a room—planes broken up by numerous things, objects of furniture and persons—it can be seen that the far end of a table, which tries to bend up into a position more nearly parallel to the picture surface, or the walls which tend to bend round into a similar position, are so to speak only trying to fit themselves into one of the squarish holes of the fish-net. Bonnard's forms all tend to assume

the shape of a cube with rounded corners: a squarish lozenge is the prototype of form with which many of his objects seek identity.

The other thing that this fish-net may emphasize is the apparently unending, allover nature of Bonnard's design. There is an extraordinarily wide distribution of accent and pictorial stress. Right into the corners of the canvas we follow a display, a layout, in which interest is as intense half an inch from the picture's edge as it is at the centre. Usually the edge of the canvas slices off half (or even four-fifths!) of some object at which our eyes have arrived with the greatest anticipation. Nevertheless, there is never any sense of arbitrariness; or of the composition being a mere slice of whatever was to be seen from where the painter was standing; it is just that the fish-net extends its rhythm, unbroken, to the very confines of the picture space.

Painting, I repeat, must represent a marriage of 'inner' and 'outer': of subjective and objective. The innermost recesses of the painter's mind react to the image of the visible exterior world: he makes a selection of exterior images and then re-creates them after his own desire. So the created thing, the painting, reflects both the world and himself. What quality did Bonnard thus bestow upon the selected objects of his love? The objects themselves we know: we can recognize them because he was never impelled, as other moderns have been, to conceal them in a system of extreme distortion. The scattered objects on a table under a wide window: a girl idly cupping her face in her hands or bending to stroke the cat: this is a favourite subject. In *The Bowl of Milk*—here reproduced in Plate 25—the girl is walking towards the artist with some milk for the shadowy expectant puss that stalks across the bottom of the canvas, with tail on high. Every shape in the design on this canvas is familiar in the sense that we can immediately interpret it as an object. And every object in the room is familiar in the sense that we can immediately recognize it for what it is: the oblong table-top with the rectangular pattern upon it of light and shadow cast by the window-frame: the large round table with a bowl of anemones, dark and rich: the balustrade of a narrow balcony beyond the window and the blue freckles of the lake water or the sea between and beyond. There is no deciphering to be done, as with Picasso and Braque: all we have to do is to look and enjoy: and as we look we become aware, bit by bit, of the intricate marvels of design and colour and plastic solidity of what at first sight seemed so natural an arrangement as to be almost artless. But this subject chosen, what does Bonnard do? Why is this a Bonnard room, a Bonnard girl, a

Bonnard table and window? The answer lies partly in the instinctive arrangement he makes with the shapes of these things in relation to each other and to the edges of the picture, to the frame: but partly also in the *quality* of each object, each segment in the whole design. As to the former, we can see that this composition is based on a system of oblongs and diamond shapes: at the centre of this picture is the big diamond of sunlit table-top, with the big white plate in the middle of its lower half: between its own shadow and the shadow of the horizontal window-bar this white plate assumes a lozenge shape (which in turn is suggestive of a horizontal diamond form). As I said, Bonnard pulls many forms into this shape, just as he also manages to imply an oblong with rounded corners in objects that are utterly remote, in reality, from an oblong form: note the square-round shadow inside the top of the jug. Next to this diamond patch of light table-top is a bar of deep shadow cast by the vertical window-frame: it is a narrow oblong of deep, rich colour interrupted in the middle by the light patch of a cup and saucer. As this bar of darker colour extends diagonally down in succession over table, cup and saucer, tray, and table again, it breaks up into a strip of checks—a string of diamond shapes, or squarish patches made diamond by perspective. This checkered pattern extends as well to both right and left of this bar of shadow: see how the right-hand edge of the saucer, sticking out into the light, makes a dazzling patch which is at once balanced by a fragment of dark still further to the right—a piece of the shadow of the horizontal window-bar, which bounds the big plate on its further side. The whole picture is a series of lighter or darker checks—except for the flat front of the girl's dress, which becomes, roughly, a huge vertical oblong of shadow filling the right-hand side of the picture.

I have pointed out this check structure because, as I have been arguing, I believe it is the abstract basis of all Bonnard's compositions. The fish-net has been thrown over his canvas: he has had to paint his picture through the square or diamond holes. I also mentioned the *quality* Bonnard's objects have. If one looks at the jug in this same picture and sees how he has stroked it into shape, caressed its shadowed side with dark blues and greens until it bulges with the utmost solidity and rotundity! It is the same with the anemones (see the square-round rhythm of each flower head in the bunch of darkness); the same with the table-top and with the expanse of wall behind: his capacity to *go on feeling* the thing, to go on stroking it into shape, with all the knowledge, observation and love of a lifetime behind each touch—this

capacity was endless in Bonnard. The profoundest spatial depth inheres in every shape, every arrangement of colour and line: the essential tension (characteristic of all great painting) between spatial depth and design (the fish-net configuration) is marvellously maintained. The gibe that Bonnard was merely a decorator of the flat surface is completely unjustified, as you can judge from the voluminous depth and sunlit air evoked in this painting *The Bowl of Milk*. The imagination which can construct a picture in spatial terms such as these is, pictorially speaking, of the highest order. It is neither decorative, nor imitative. It goes beyond what the camera confirms the painter in seeing. Bonnard's imagination did not stop short at *twisting* the real world, moulding it to his own purposes; at bending straight things and straightening bent ones, against the laws of gravity and optics. He did all these things; and he was sanctioned by pictorial laws, which are not the same.

When, in 1947, Bonnard died, in his villa in the South of France, it was a personal shock. One felt one knew him, in an almost personal sense, because he himself (round steel-rimmed glasses, small moustache, garden hat), his domestic habits, his actual way of life in its intimate setting were all perfectly presented to us in so many of his pictures. In his work he has perhaps immortalized those particular and concrete entities that were in fact the very furniture of his existence: one woman in every posture, act and mood—Madame Bonnard: check tablecloths galore; a tea-cosy; a white dresser; a fruit-basket with a wicker handle; a tall straight jug, flowered and slightly ribbed; a little brown dog with flopping, triangular ears—all have been presented to us, and to posterity. The kindly, happy genius of Pierre Bonnard was not only nourished and made possible by a particular culture, a particular domesticity; but, of its nature, it *recorded* this setting, and recorded it with love, and a wealth of descriptive detail which will fascinate for generations to come. This is so because the inspiration of the art was also the subject of the pictures—and this is not a thing we can always say of the best modern painting, which is notable for certain transferences of subject-matter, a certain compression of the data of the senses and a kind of visual allusion which is absent from Bonnard and Vuillard. Indeed, it is probable that it was Bonnard's open and direct treatment of the subjects of his pictures, the fact that they are obviously, recognizably and only what they are, that gave rise to the view that he was 'not quite modern', and therefore not in the first flight.

Picasso and Braque, and their followers, knew how to allude to

landscape in painting a complicated still-life arrangement; knew how to evoke a seaport or a Breton harbour, semicircular, and chock-a-block with wedges of carpentry (for boats) and backed by cubes of masonry, simply by transferring the textures of wood-graining, together with the tarry blues, the short lengths of rope and the freckled light that water reflects upwards—simply by transferring these to the objects littering the rounded table-top. But Bonnard's method was to *invest* more and more quality, more and more beauty in those unfeigning objects of his, which remained themselves throughout. No violent metamorphosis, but a slow and profound addition is the history of the face, the figure, the pear tree or the lamp in a picture by Bonnard. What distortion there is, that might commonly be named as such, proceeds from his intuitive grasp of the inner movement of each form; from his power of empathy; from his ability to concentrate into a single act his visual knowledge, his tactile awareness, his sensual delight and his actual love.

I have not spoken of Bonnard's landscape paintings. In the sort of pictures which I have mentioned most (the interiors, with their balcony windows), landscape is treated rather as though it was simply one of the properties of 'an interior'; it is the dark blue hole enclosed within the frame, not of a picture on the wall, but of the window or half-open garden door. Landscape in such paintings was the world beyond the verandah, the panorama glimpsed through and beyond a trellis; it is merely a depth, interrupted by the fat legs of a balcony balustrade. Its softnesses are always well-groomed, civilized, fecund, receptive, blue-green, purple and apricot; the Provençal roofs embedded in the olive slopes.

But this was not landscape's only rôle. Again and again, throughout his long career as a painter, Bonnard ventured out into the fiercely horizontal meadows and orchards of Normandy; out among the vineyards or the pines of the Côte d'Azur; or to the rocky rim (rocks red or blue) of the empty, glittering, eternally changing meadow of the sea. The sea was a twitching Persian carpet, scattered with dark-blue jujubes; embroidered with countless fat little yellow zeds; heavy with little purple plums. The wide-open, blank, boatless horizontality of this vibrating sea-meadow suggested to Bonnard a system of abstract forms. He equated all the vast, receding, open-air planes of seascape or landscape with just those abstract bars and lozenge-forms I have described him using in another context.

How does the optimism of Bonnard look to contemporary eyes in

Britain? Do we appreciate those formal values which underlay his felicitous art? Listen to a contemporary English critic: '. . . British art cannot indefinitely labour under the burden of inferiority with which it has been saddled by Roger Fry and his friends. The notion that a sense of plastic values provides the only valid criterion of the visual arts is pure prejudice. . . .' These words from a recent book review in *The Listener* are not an isolated case of insular aesthetics going hand in hand with natural pride: on the contrary, they epitomize a widespread change in the aesthetic climate in England, a change which has lately involved an inversion of meaning in a number of key words in our critical vocabulary. I suppose I am young enough to be old-fashioned on the subject of Fry. For me he is still the greatest English exponent of the purely pictorial values. Critics a lot older than myself, but younger than Fry, have, inevitably, pointed out his limitations: he does not, of course, conform to the more recent pattern for art critics—he was a man of strong conviction, passionate insight and, therefore, blind spots (thank goodness!). This contrasts markedly with the more scientific critic of to-day, to whose more 'objective' outlook a blind spot is more to be deplored than the corresponding insight is to be desired. Fry was out of sympathy with German art: and, more important, he failed to see that the 'significant form' (Mr. Clive Bell's phrase) of, say, one of Cézanne's apples derived that significance as much from a real apple as from the element of abstract rotundity it embodied.

This showed a bias in favour of that pictorial ingredient we now variously refer to as the abstract, architectural, structural, compositional, geometric or formal element. But thirty or so years ago such a bias was a positive revelation. It acted upon English pictorial thought and practice as dynamically and decisively as the writings of D. H. Lawrence did—in quite another sphere. In making this emphasis Fry was very much in sympathy with the creative development of the time: Cubism and Constructivism were between them progressively excluding the subject from painting and sculpture. But I think we can safely surmise that the logical result of this process of abstraction (which gained his most articulate enthusiasm so long as it was still in harness to a figurative end) would have proved far too logical for his liking. For above all Fry was true to his fantastically sensitive eye: theory stumbled along in the wake of sensibility. He would surely have considered that, with the pure abstraction of to-day, the traditional balance—form *and* content—had been lost, form having ousted non-formal content, if not completely, at any rate to an unprecedented

degree. But he would not for that reason have been disposed, as many are to-day, to welcome a new and opposite disequilibrium, a sort of revived Pre-Raphaelitism, in which an emotive subject-matter is rendered at the cost of all formal instinct. Unfortunately these two extremes, these two aesthetic heresies, of pure abstraction on the one hand and expressionist figuration on the other, are much in favour just now: the central tradition, in which the impulse to abstract is checked by the impulse to communicate 'a subject', and in which that subject is divested of its fiercer emotive overtones because it has been translated into formal terms—this is neglected.

A wonderful example of this amalgam of abstraction and figuration is the painting of Pierre Bonnard. When that immense canvas of his, *L'Eté* (*circa* 1907: it is 8 ft. 6 in. high and 11 ft. 2 in. long), was shown at the Hanover Gallery during the summer of 1951, I felt that it very forcibly illustrated our present plight. This marvellous picture showed to what an extent modern painting has recently accelerated its own metamorphosis. An art that should be pre-eminently visual in its sources of inspiration has become merely intellectual: the subtlety of observed shapes has given way to the repetitive rhythm of symbols. The special realm of painting, the visual realm, has been increasingly ignored. Painting, we were reminded by this Bonnard masterpiece, has jettisoned its birthright, which is the imaginative interpretation of the infinitely suggestive, infinitely complex texture of visual reality, the reality of the eye. Painting, we were reminded, is no longer a window through which we may see familiar sights, but see them afresh because they have been distorted, and given a new emphasis, twist or accent by a process that is one of translation, not reproduction. Instead, the function of painting is now more comparable to that of a cinema screen upon which images are projected . . . out of man's dark mind. Thus, one almost felt, painting no longer interprets a daylight world: rather, it projects a dream world. The most respectable source of inspiration, the most acceptable starting-point for pictorial procedures is no longer the visual delight of an eye that participates in the life around it: it is, rather, the most private and uneasy seat of an individual's disquiet. And the artist lacking this neurotic qualification is, in effect, advised to concoct one: better a fake disquiet, it seems, than anything approximating to unconcealed delight.

Ours is in some ways a Dark Age, it is true. Yet, as Henry Moore once said in a broadcast conversation, 'We mustn't feel sorry for ourselves!' If we succumb to the logic which insists that because we are

aware of tragic events the only valid art for us is one that is pessimistic in content and harsh in form, we shall lose more than our capacity to create painting and sculpture. The plastic colour of Bonnard proclaims the anciently valid response of the painter to the world about him: that response is one of delight and amazement and we must recapture it. 'The abstract glory of colour and form' (a phrase I thought I once read in Ruskin, but cannot re-discover) cannot be conveyed except in a pictorial language based on plastic values, for space also derives from the plastic. Plastic values, so strong in Bonnard, are optimistic: they must never be denied (as in the Pre-Raphaelites, Blake, or Sutherland), but they may appear in disguise, as in Picasso and Klee. Plastic and spatial values are the chief values held in common by the most disparate masters: Bonnard, Constable or Leonardo. They alone confer upon this art its unique outwardness and optimism; without them painting becomes literature. Bonnard is not literature.

9

MAURICE DE VLAMINCK

MAURICE DE VLAMINCK, born in 1876, is alive to-day; but it is possible that he is feeling neglected: it is certain that he is less of a figure in modern painting at the present moment than he was twenty or thirty years ago. It is also certain that a number of his contemporaries, including his old friend of Chatou, André Derain, have for long been regarded as painters of superior eminence, their work having had an altogether greater influence upon the course of twentieth-century art.

That all this is the case is a misfortune for M. Vlaminck personally, especially in view of earlier events. For Vlaminck was without doubt one of the leaders of that extremely important movement in French painting known as *Fauvisme*. In fact, he has been acclaimed as the founder of Fauve painting; certainly his works in the Fauve manner are as fine as the works by Derain or Braque in the same style. It is even possible that, with the exception of Matisse, whose Fauve pictures now strike us as having more in common with the Matisses of the future than with his fellow Fauves of 1905, the Fauve paintings of Vlaminck are the most typical of all. For Derain, Braque, Matisse and Marquet *Fauvisme* marked a stage, it was an educative experience of a temporary nature, it was primarily a break-away from a despised academicism and, as such, there was that in it which merely provided the material for a new academicism. Hence the extraordinary degree of similarity between the works of these artists at that time—a similarity far more marked and far more fundamental than that which we find between the early Cubist paintings of Picasso, Gris and Braque (Braque was not a Fauve for long).

But the case of Vlaminck was surely different. Vlaminck was the most natural 'primitive' of them all, as we may judge from his subsequent work, which expresses the maximum of emotion with the minimum of artifice and seeks an ever-increased intensity of effect without enlarging and extending a familiar and accepted means. Such a straining after force as we are aware of in the less successful among his mature works is associated, in my mind at least, with the term 'Expressionist'. The briefest glance at the past will obviously reveal much of excellence that we should call Expressionist art: the things which we admire superlatively in Breughel, for instance, are qualities of imagination, without doubt; but they are precisely the qualities which are essentially extrinsic to the formal economy of design, of colour and form; they are, in fact, contemplated and enjoyed in detachment from the painting: for Breughel's plastic gift we have a far lesser regard. But, in the context of modern art, 'Expressionist' implies an imperfect marriage of emotion and form, of meaning and aesthetic. Twentieth-century Expressionist painting is defective as art because it is painting in which the formal means at the artist's disposal are insufficient or inappropriate as the vehicle for the emotion he is trying to express; so that we are aware of a surplus of feeling surrounding each gesture, clogging the flow of articulate images and even blunting, by its presence, the impact of that which has successfully been stated.

If there is sometimes a suggestion of this kind of thing in Vlaminck —and his Flemish ancestry may not be altogether beside the point— he does avoid it for the most part on account of his innate sensibility to formal values and his magnificent gift for the manipulation of the paint itself. No one living better knows the uses of impasto and few can so successfully indicate plastic facts with such a limited variety of tonal colours: with a palette that amounts very often to little more than modified blacks and whites, Vlaminck has the gift of evoking landscape and still life with a suggested radiance that is clearly in excess of his actual means. Light in Vlaminck's pictures is generated by an opposition of what are really brownish-, bluish-, greenish-, reddish- or yellowish-blacks and a similar variety of soiled whites. But there are vital exceptions: reduced tonally to areas that are either predominantly dark or light, a landscape by Vlaminck is nevertheless incomplete, uncreated, until the painter has introduced those brief slabs of pure, and often primary, colour, red, yellow, blue, green, pure white or black, at certain key points in the composition. The local colour of a red chimney-pot, a black telegraph-pole, a green petrol-pump with its

white globe, or a whitewashed or tar-washed wall may suggest that device of a piece of pure colour, set like a jewel in the sombre colour of the whole, which intensifies the latent luminosity of the browns and dirty greys, greens and blacks and, like a ray of sunlight, lights the whole thing up.

Where would the slimy greenish-browns of the foreground in *La Gare d'Auvers-sur-Oise* (Plate 40) land us if the red bricks on the right-hand corner of the station, the white of the foreshortened station wall, the sudden cobalt stain on the horizon (between houses), the stroke of red under the chimney of the further house and the white streak on the yellow road, to the right of the two figures, were missing? Of course, this is a picture which, in more respects than one, is nicely poised on the brink of catastrophe. The box-like station building is set bang in the middle of the canvas and has to act as the main connection between the plane of the sky and the equally uneventful plane of the station yard. Incidentally, Vlaminck uses his signature here as an important factor in the pictorial structure: a notice-board on a post or another human figure would have to be introduced at the bottom right-hand corner if the signature were to go: its presence helps to create the space we feel circulating about the two figures, a volume of air and light which we sense as existing between the two buildings, connecting them yet holding them apart. Without the signature this space would disappear and the blue stain at the horizon between and beyond the two houses would lose its distance and cease to be the focal point, the point of the greatest recessional depth. We should immediately be confronted with a meaningless symmetry, empty of any significance of organized space or pictorial depth: engine steam would stand opposite the single cloud; engine and train opposite distant house; railway railings opposite yellow road and figures; telegraph-pole opposite the further of the station building's two chimneys. As it is, all this is averted by the signature at the right and the hint of wires through the steam at the top left. Nevertheless, Vlaminck has had as usual to break the back of the horizon: everything to the left of the station house slopes down, away; and as in Plate 41, *La Route de l'Aigle*, where the leftmost roof dives down to earth, there is the sense of augmented space above; these exaggerated perspectives, sloping too steeply down, create a bigger sky-space immediately above, behind and beyond themselves.

In connection with these down-tipping features, whose edges are so sharp, crude and expressive, we may note an important characteristic of Vlaminck's art: the harsh flatness—taken almost to the point of arbi-

trariness—of his large, unmodulated planes. The *drawing* of the end of the little white station (Plate 40 again) indicates a single plane it is true, but, in so far as it is a reference to architecture it seems flimsy, more like a paper house than one of more solid material: our sense of stucco and brick derives more from the texture of the paint than anything else. As a plane it is very slightly concave, seeming to curve out at the edges a little; and the same applies to the whiter, foreshortened wall, as well as to the brown-red roof of the further house. It is in fact a characteristic of the more obvious planes in Vlaminck's paintings that they create the illusion of the solidity of their objects by a hardening and up-bending towards the edges (of the planes). Cézanne and the Cubists, on the other hand, created their objects with planes which became less definite, hard and flat at their edges; the centre of each plane, in a painting by Cézanne, is the part that is most emphatic and most definitive of the form of the object depicted. Not so Vlaminck's planes: hardening and darkening in colour at their edges, their plastic power lies less in an interaction between the angles of their surfaces than in the tensions which gather along their gesticulating margins. This is true especially where the walls and roofs of buildings are the subject. But if Vlaminck's planes lack plastic density in themselves, if their shape is sometimes determined more with regard for their function as units of design than as agents of plastic definition, density is recaptured by virtue of the quality of his pigment. Like Utrillo, he bestows rare plastic qualities of solidity and weight upon the most summary structures and the most unlikely surfaces by means of a devoted attention to texture, a loving belabouring with the richest impastos: but, unlike Soutine, he manages to keep his rich mixtures relevant to the plastic meaning of the whole structure or composition. If one feels—as one sometimes does—that the heavy layers, forced on by the knife, are too wild, too patently desperate, the fault does not lie in an indulgent and meaningless play with the sensuous means, the paint itself. This is the frequent failing of Soutine; but Vlaminck's violent failures—when they occur—are structural; with an arrangement that has been imperfectly felt from the start, his hand will get desperate, the black tube and the white will be employed with increasing fury and those pure notes of vermilion or cadmium yellow, which should wink like serene signals through the dark grey storm, are at last sucked in and dirtied too.

Although I have not seen the original, there is a painting, *Blés Coupés*, painted in 1945, which has a failure of the kind I have just been

describing in the cornfield foreground. Vlaminck seems to have found little interest in the recession of the yellow-gold field: even the discovery of a cartwheel motif—the lines of the green field and certain tensions in the distant part of the cornfield where it approaches the outlying barns of the village, a part which has a calmer surface and a purplish-brown modification of the yellow, converging upon the dark olive-green roof—even this movement seems half-hearted and improbable. So he has resorted to a massive scribble: if it is redeemed from meaninglessness, it will be by virtue of an intrinsic poetry of colour as such: but one would have to see the original, because Vlaminck has here attempted something both unfamiliar and—if it is a success—of considerable subtlety.

But sometimes he uses a single mixture over great planes with remarkable success. Sometimes the near grasses of a vast field are slammed down in, say, a dark mixture of viridian and black, and Vlaminck may stick to this mixture with little or no modification—either with white, which would produce a greyer, bluer note giving distance, the sense of aerial perspective; or with yellow, which might modulate the flat, receding surface of the field by a varied warmth of colour suggestive of changing light—right up to the very horizon, and we shall nevertheless gather the conviction of immense outdoor distance. Perhaps this is a bit of a *tour de force* (to paint with success a man must achieve the impossible with every stroke). But it is not a trick of any kind: it actually derives from Cézanne's upending of receding planes. In a multitude of different forms such a 'frontalizing' of the surfaces of objects, thereby bringing them into close relation with the surface of the canvas by swivelling them round into a position more nearly parallel to that surface, is indeed a distinguishing feature of all modern painting of the first order. In an extreme form it occurs in the later developments of Cubism; and Braque has never abandoned a vision which leads the eye into objects at an angle of 90°. Then, when he has got us looking straight into the surface of table-top, match-box, jug or wall, he slips a magnifying glass across the line of vision and draws our attention to the intrinsic quality, the actual nature of the wood, paper, glaze. In this way Braque contemplates, in an almost mystical sense, the reality of each object, each familiar bit of commonplace furniture, so impregnated by human use as to possess an inscrutable potency.

Now Derain, Utrillo, Vlaminck and Segonzac are alone among the best modern painters in one very important respect. Unlike Picasso,

Gris, Braque and to some extent Matisse, they have never developed in any similar degree what we may call (rather unsatisfactorily, perhaps) an intellectual condensation and compression of visual data. The Cubist masters and their followers—whether or not they practise what still goes under the name—all break down the natural order of the material found in the visual field and reconstruct it again upon a principle of intuitive selection: the order, sequence and 'placing' of the things thus re-created upon the canvas is obviously derived from the natural disposition of these things as the artist observes them in his 'subject' or *motif*. Yet it is derivation and not imitation: in the process there is time for many influences, memories or desires to affect the result. Thus the guitar or the glass in a Picasso still life may not only contain the concentrated essence of these things, whether seen fortuitously or previously arranged by the painter; they may also display rhythms, colour-relationships and textures that have been observed in quite a different setting: the rope and tar and glinting light off water may all be imported into a still life from a remembered harbour somewhere. Many a still life by Braque and Picasso is simply a landscape in disguise. But not so Derain and Vlaminck. Landscape painters by nature, and perhaps less adventurous (though Derain is indeed a great painter), they have remained content to keep to a scheme dominated by a single perspective: no transitions such as the Cubists make find a place in their approach; they have persisted with an open treatment of the natural scene involving comparatively little distortion or compression.

Of course, *intellectual* was not a happy epithet: the Cubist masters are really no more and no less intellectual in their creative processes than a painter like Vlaminck, who suggests more than most, I suppose, the adjective *instinctive*. But the painting that has come from their brushes does make an appeal that is primarily to our instinct for order and form and intricately realized equilibrium: a sensuous appeal is not lacking from Cubist painting, as is sometimes supposed by superficial observers; but the formal intensity predominates. The other aspects of the complex appeal that good painting makes are present as well in Cubist works: for instance, the poetry as opposed to the aesthetic of the Cubist painting of Gris, Braque and Picasso is very distinct and deserves remark, for it has been largely ignored on account of the superior force of the impact made by the unfamiliar aesthetic or formal aspect of Cubism.

With the painting of Vlaminck this situation is reversed, the poetry having been felt to a greater extent than the design. Yet, co-existent

with their more obvious qualities of a personal poetry and romanticism that is often gloomy and even violent, Vlaminck's pictures have a formal logic, an underlying strength of organization that derives from more than one classical precedent. The early paintings of Cézanne and the mature ones of Van Gogh, as well as the seemingly summary compositions of Daumier, which are in fact consummate demonstrations of design, have all contributed, one feels, to Vlaminck's education as a painter for whom the very faculty of design is 'second Nature'. That his failures are failures of design as well as of something less easily defined does not alter the fact of his ability in this sphere; and it is this power of maintaining the flow of design, of giving us the sense that there are no patched-up flaws in the structure of his composition—which is such a feature of the work of English Romantics of the present time—which provides the vehicle for his feeling. Admittedly Vlaminck sometimes sets himself the minimal task so far as design is concerned: on occasion the structure of that design may comprise but the bare essentials of a pictorial economy. But when he does this it is in order to be free to concentrate (with apparent obliviousness of structural necessities) upon the expression of the specific emotion that a particular landscape arouses, upon bodying forth his sheer romantic adoration of a particular place at a particular moment in time: a stormy afternoon at the Atlantic's edge, grey light over the bile-green swell: owl-light on the outskirts of a long, straggling, unlovely village of Northern France, the last, lorn barns and the lowlying cottages spiking the dusk with their milky gable-ends, crude and sharp; the glimmer of petrol-pumps and the smouldering, rusty blacks of the hulk of a car by the side of the long straight highway: the long line and litter of house-shapes when snow is over and under all: the desperate gestures of a marshalled line of underfed, lopped trees caught in the long-drawn sigh of a gale-wind of autumn, a sad, hurried sky flowing high, clouds streaky in flight: the plight of corn caught by rain and gale, swooning into its own swooning arms; immobile barns, eyes and doors shut, silent and helpless: the sideways lurch of posts and poles, gables and chimney-stacks under the sideways pressure and strain of a horizontal world.

Somewhere there is something in the work of a good painter which, though unsayable, is uniquely his: the invisible core of poetic emotion which draws to itself the means and the wherewithal of plastic expression. Brooding over Vlaminck's art, we may spot the centre of his meaning, and have no word for it. Let us be content to say that the specific emotion aroused by a specific landscape is the real subject of

his mature painting. Once we have accepted this fact we shall be less tempted to make a number of comparisons which lead to a number of conclusions that are unfavourable to Vlaminck. For instance, we shall not be as likely to say that his colour is muddy or monotonous, or that it lacks those juxtapositions which manufacture (as it were) luminosity, after a comparison with Matisse, if we recognize the *function* of Vlaminck's hot and smudgy blacks; if we realize the part that these muddy tones play in the process of evoking those visions of bleak, flat landscape. Nor shall we cite the superior clarity of Derain's highly articulate forms, forms which he uses to construct an olive grove upon the swelling yellow-red contours of a Provençal hillside, and be content to imply Derain's superiority. Matisse's colour as such is infinitely richer and subtler than Vlaminck's: and if we compare them simply as examples of formal organization, Derain's forms, classical, hard and clear, will wipe the board with Vlaminck's rough, elongated planes. But the comparison of parallel aspects is far from being the most important task of criticism. If criticism must ultimately relate the total meaning, the total achievement of painters, there are preliminary investigations to be performed which may require greater subtlety and tact. Here I believe my first duty is to consider Vlaminck's paintings in the context of themselves; to measure their achievement against their aspiration; to discover their essential aspect and to attempt to proclaim its exact validity. In other words, to say what Vlaminck's art can of its nature be expected to do or be, and what it cannot.

One of the most typical of Vlaminck's 'vanishing-straight-road' landscapes is *La Route de l'Aigle* (Plate 41). It is an excellent example of the straggling village kind of Vlaminck and it illustrates the cart-wheel composition which is so typical of his landscapes. Not only the two edges of the blue-grey road, but the perspectival wedge of diminishing houses; the low line of clear blue in the sky; the lines of the lower branches shooting up on both sides of the nearest tree, as well as the twisting verticals of its trunk; the thick green-black line of bushes stretching across the field on the right of the trees; the dark green wedge of that little field itself and, within it, the line suggested by the feet of the four receding trees in line; the pale emerald wedge, very narrow, that comes in from the bottom right-hand corner of the canvas and suggests a shallow ditch running between the field and the green verge, as well as the apex of the triangle of that verge—all lead to a point on the horizon lying exactly behind the bole of the big near tree. This centripetal movement is at first a little overwhelming; the

pull of the hub is so strong we feel the painter's eye has lingered too little on the verge or among the gables; we feel that the main forms have been streamlined into agreement with the radiating wedges of the design at the expense of their full individual realization. But soon the secondary movements insinuate themselves; we feel the check which the red-brown roof administers to the whole scheme of perspective, with its flying, wedge-making lines, and this is reinforced by the more severely distorted roof of the nearest house, on the left; a roof whose dramatic function is intense on account of its extreme darkness in contrast with the ochre-and-white of its gable-end as well as its accentuated perspective, its dive-down-to-earth. But it is the brown oblong of the roof of the only 'normal', upright house in the picture which 'pegs' this scheme of almost mobile shapes, distorted diamonds and wedges. Aerial volume, however, is generated in particular by the interaction of the diving-down line of the dark roof (left) and the leftward-bending upper part of the near tree: given the arrangement as it stands, space would have been denied if the tree-trunk had not thus twisted to the left. Why certain oppositions of line and mass are more potent of explosive space than others it would be very difficult to say. Yet such precisely are the problems besetting the mind of the painter, of whatever age or school.

Now there is nothing which holds less interest for a modern eye than a pictorial scheme built upon a single perspective, in which everything falls away with Italian correctness to a single vanishing-point located upon the horizon: such are, quite literally, one-eyed schemes; they record a perspective seen by a single, static eye, or the lens of a camera. *La Route de l'Aigle* should not be confused with this sort of thing, which is only re-enacted, so to speak, by academic painters nowadays. Modern painting owes half its interest and vitality to the fact that Cézanne insisted upon making pictures which we can now see were in fact demonstrations of multi-perspective: that is to say, many vistas, many conflicting angles of vision are recorded in the painting of a single subject. Woven into the harmonious configurations of his painting of two apples, a milk-jug and a ginger-jar there is the visual evidence gained from staring at many different points among these objects. While Cézanne looked at the point on an apple nearest his eye there was one apple-centred perspective: when he looked *between* apple and jug at the table-top there was another scheme, a 'vista' between apple and jug, making itself felt. Indeed, Cézanne seems to have discovered that every movement of the seeing eye establishes, as

it were, a scheme of perspective of its own that is centred at whatever point upon whatever surface the eye is momentarily focusing upon. When the eye glances away the scheme dissolves, to re-form about the next point of focus.

Whatever may be the scientific basis of this apparent novelty of vision, one thing remains certain: no first-rate painter succeeding Cézanne in time has gone back on this new sensation of space which I call 'multi-perspective'. None, in their attempts to capture a new sense of reality, have gone back to single-perspective. The infinite number of possible centres of perspective, possible points of focus, which exist in any subject is recognized in Cubism, where visual emphasis or accent is widely distributed, every plane becoming a focal centre, hard, resistant and shapely. On the other hand Matisse's distortions of drawing and disposition of mass register to some extent the sliding images which come to an eye in motion. Circling rapidly about a chosen ensemble of objects and figures, Matisse's eye might almost be said to concern itself more with the visual relationship of these things than with the things themselves. But there is one result which the canvases of Matisse and the Cubist masters have in common which particularly concerns me here: the complete absence of any point of distance, any example of extreme recession or depth. Even where landscape is involved, its horizons are invariably brought forward into a closer relationship with the picture surface than is possible if they are allowed to remain ten or twenty miles away! The recession of landscape only finds expression in twentieth-century painting in Derain, Vlaminck, Segonzac and certain minor artists.[1] Derain's organization of distant landscape subjects is an affair of closely measured, successive but diminishing forms brilliantly interlocked: while retaining their formal character as individual units these forms build up into a total architecture of majestic implications; it is indeed a case of a classical grandeur crowning a structure whose semi-abstract components have been organized like music. Yet there are vivid devices of immediate expressiveness in Derain. To give the final stamp—'Distance!'—he imports a device from Poussin: the sudden dramatic introduction of the conventional blue of distant mountains is frequently made with a flourish. This is often a hair's-breadth away from catastrophe, for it contradicts the method of construction by gradual transitions of colour and tone by

[1] Hitchens and Lanyon are preoccupied precisely with reconciling landscape recession and a post-Cubist vocabulary of form. See *Hills and Faces*.

which he builds: nevertheless, this, and those controlled streaks of black and white down the trunks of trees (which have jumped several stages in the normal process of tonal definition), are the marks of genius; the nonconformist strokes which create the greatest beauty.

Now Vlaminck insists on piercing with a single gesture to the full distance of his horizon. His landscapes might almost begin with his drawing a strong, straight, horizontal line right across the canvas, thus determining at once the exact proportions of sky and land. That such a situation as this creates is full of perils may easily be imagined: indeed, it is sometimes obvious that he has failed to modify the uncomfortable proportions of an initial arrangement by the manipulation of his secondary forms. But in *La Route de l'Aigle* he has triumphed over such difficulties. The cross made by the low horizon and the vertical tree (which marks a division of the picture's length into two-thirds and one-third, while the horizon does the same thing in the other dimension) is very successfully concealed—the first by the see-saw movement of roofs and the in-and-out action of walls that just avoid falling into a single or parallel lines: the second by the taut springiness of the big tree, bending like a bow between the rival weights of storm-cloud and darkening land and drawing to itself the electric force of meagre branches, as well as the tops of the further trees, as it crackles upwards, a sort of black forked-lightning seen against the white nearness of the hurrying, wind-troubled sky of a winter afternoon.

I have tried to find Vlaminck's essential aspect; and I have also striven to relate this aspect to the main movements in painting of our time. Rich as a period the first half of the present century undoubtedly is: yet the contradictions implied in the combined works of a number of contemporaries possessing genius could not be more acute. Vlaminck finds himself even more isolated than Derain, who shared a classical mastery with Picasso. Vlaminck is not only a landscape painter; he is a Romantic landscape painter. This is a species that has almost died out. But the artist whose work I have been attempting to analyse is undoubtedly the greatest of living specimens. The near future may well restore some of the fame which Vlaminck seems to have lost; not only because his gifts and achievement have been underrated but because the whole approach of the Romantic landscapist, which he alone exemplifies with any greatness at present, may well commend itself to the painters who must arise.

10

FOUR NOTES

Klee, Matisse, Soutine, Léger

PAUL KLEE

It is strange indeed, in the shadow of England's most imperial column, where the traffic of the millions has its vortex, to find a diversion of the flow caused by the stained scraps of paper and canvas which are all the mark left in a visible world by one, Paul Klee. Yet such was the case when, in 1946, thousands disappeared from the pavements of Trafalgar Square to gaze at these scraps, which had been arranged in an exhibition at the National Gallery; to stare at these pictures made up of little blotchy squares and triangles of coy, soft colour and trembling lines; or lines rigid but floating, like scattered matches; and in which, almost inevitably, there is a flat disc-shape of differentiated texture and colour; hard, bright and orange—the Sun! Soft, gleaming, decayed at the rim—the Moon! One or both of these are always with us: so some kind of disc is discoverable in most pictures by Klee. Such is his logic—the non-logic of 'free fancy', as Herbert Read has christened it in *Art Now*. But in calling this fantasy 'free' one implies a medium in which it is free, is manifest. What drew the public along the walls at this exhibition was the fascination which a sensibility *recorded* always exerts. Here, then, is a magnet, minute but intense; the very name of this artist is (if we may pronounce it in English) like the high-pitched buzz of the smallest, brightest insect: Klee!—too high, you might think, to fall within the range of so many ears? But it seems likely that Paul Klee will be accepted to a greater degree in this country than other and greater contemporaries from

France; and for this the reasons are fairly obvious. In England, spirit, imagination, fantasy, have always found their most important outlet in letters; and this literary supremacy has overwhelmed the claims of radically different modes of expression. One might say, with certainty, that in England the unconscious criterion of sheer articulateness lies in that kind of articulation we call speech: for it is clear that even the clumsiest equivalent *in words* for visual or sensuous experience is felt to be more valid than plastic, graphic or any other kind of visual expression. The important exhibition of 1946 occasioned a prose-poem or two by way, no doubt, of criticism; a distinction the Picassos on view at the Victoria and Albert Museum earlier the same year did not win for themselves. For the Picasso pictures, though poetic to the core, implied in every stroke a whole tradition of *plastic construction*—spoke every instant a completely *formal* language, which is one few Englishmen really understand.

Klee does not present this difficulty: his is an art which compels by virtue of an intense subjective flavour, a suggestive poetry, rather than by any formal logic or originality. Naturally, he is much at home with the square rhythms and semi-abstract idioms of this century, and he manages the organization of his pictures with unfailing taste. But whereas it is precisely in this pictorial organization that the genius of a great painter is usually felt most obviously and intensely, carrying the force of conviction into new arrangements of form and space, Klee remains merely adequate in this respect, and depends for the real electricity of his artistic shock upon the unique poetic quality of his content—which is the fairyland of a mental world. Indeed, if we compare Klee's compositions with those of such a master of formal design as Georges Braque—and in both there is abundance of superlative 'taste'—we shall almost be driven to regard Klee's plastic gifts as mediocre. Braque's pictures have a constant content: still lives of very familiar objects: pears, a napkin, bottles upon a kitchen table. The force and daring of Braque's spirit is manifest solely in the *formal presentation* of these objects. The vision lies in the transformation of a familiar content into terms of a plastic convention. With Klee it is chiefly the content which is unfamiliar.

Take one of the typical earlier pictures of Klee: a small picture of houses reduced to a mosaic of roughly rectangular patches, in the ragged and tentative quality of which—it is a quality common to many of his designs—there surely shows a particular compromise with Form. The colour itself is lovely; each patch sounds a different note,

and the vibration of them in harmony has its well-prepared crescendos in several squares of luminous scarlet. What is not clear, however, is the *spatial* implication of each colour-note: and the question of space is not irrelevant, because a three-dimensional imagery is Klee's mode; he has produced no pure abstractions. But we must realize that he only evokes three-dimensional reality in order to disarrange it: even in an early work like this in which the phenomenal world still dominates the process of picture-making (we are at once aware of a natural scene undisintegrated) there is the sense of an inverted approach. The inspired quality of colours and shapes is not the end-result of a contemplation of the houses: rather these marks organized themselves upon the paper in faithful registration of something invisible, and it is the pervading houses that seem incidental. In many of his later works there is no such integrated 'scene'; objects of affective power (the kind of power symbols have, and the kind that operates in connection with any object in 'poetic association'), stated in a potent shorthand that is more mental than sensuous in derivation (idea rather than sense impression), are scattered about the picture space, so that a match-stick dog goes for a walk across the sky, upside-down; flowers gyrate in the proximity of the moon; and diminutive pine trees fringe the foreground. Thus the foreground seems far off, and the sky near; and there are endless other complications. With objects so unrelated in terms of a single perspective, pictorial unity comes to depend on other factors than the plastic. Chief of these is a poetic unity: however fantastic the mood, its domination of the entire work is faultless. Everything, from the choice of the natural forms from which Klee derives his compressed shorthand—in one picture all is conveyed in crystal abstractions, in another the veins of a leaf are the key—to the way he applies his paint—there were hardly two pictures in that large exhibition of 1946 in which the manner of application was the same; there is always immense variety in the expressive quality of his touch—everything conforms to the reigning mood. Klee's unique contribution to art lies precisely in this persuasive power which his sensibility has with the physical material to hand; in the way he could make a blot or a stain embody his poetic fantasy. As I have said, that fantasy, that content, is his real message. But it could never have been 'put across' by using somebody else's plastic vocabulary; indeed, it could not have arisen in the mind of its creator if he had not abandoned more profoundly *plastic* practices than we associate with him. The early naturalistic profile head of a woman (which was perhaps the earliest exhibit at the National Gallery) shows

how commonplace were his plastic gifts, alone, and unallied to passionate fantasy. How wise he was to abandon so completely such a mode, and to cultivate the slighter means that remained to him, was long since proved by the revelation of a brand-new universe of the imagination. Artistic genius consists in no small part in the ability to recognize the limitations of one's gifts. Klee exploited his own weaknesses with unexampled brilliance.

HENRI MATISSE

I am not sure that Matisse is not the most influential of living painters.[1] If we were only to concern ourselves with the evolution of *form* in modern art, obviously we should say that he has played a less important part than Picasso or Braque. But Matisse's influence is supreme in the realm of colour: and Matisse creates his pictures, and the objects in them, in terms of colour rather than form. His extraordinarily fluent line re-creates the subject-matter of his passionately elegant, savagely intellectual canvases in terms of a compressed naturalistic imagery. The jug, the girl, the chair or table has a more or less naturalistic profile. But where the creative force is so great is in the flat colour by which he fills these profiles. The jug may be flat ultramarine, from lip to foot, with no tonal modifications. The nude may be scarlet from hip to hip. The table-top may be burning orange, the wall behind jet black, the window square filled out flatly in violet with a white line, superimposed, tracing some leafy outdoor foliage. From the jug a fountain of large viridian green blobs and dashes, surmounted by some larger lemon-yellow discs, will indicate flowers. In all this Matisse's principal and brilliant contribution to the modern imagery of the still life or 'interior' is obviously by way of colour. The essence of each brilliant hue becomes identified with a particular object. Thus, in the picture I've described, scarlet *creates* the figure, orange *creates* table, ultra-marine *creates* jug, jet black *creates* the wall of the room. But although these areas are all flat in themselves, the sense that these objects repose in space, bathed in sunlit air, is always uppermost. Although the brilliant mixtures with which Matisse fills out all the forms in his composition, all the sections of his design, are, in a conventional sense, toneless; and are, furthermore, actually applied to the canvas in a sort of flat scribble (vitally expressive in itself); the result is

[1] Matisse died (Nov. 3rd 1954) while this book was in the press.

always the *creation of space* (of a particular, measurable space, the space of this room or that hillside); of depth; and of exquisitely economical forms reposing in that space. This is the central mystery of Matisse's art. (For another picture of this kind see Plate 29.)

Nevertheless, in any history of form, of the typical forms of our period, Matisse must be accorded a lesser place than Braque or Picasso. If, in his unique gift of pure colour, he has succeeded in creating forms which unquestionably exist, and exist in space, he has done this mainly, as I have suggested, by an increasingly original juxtaposition of large areas of flat, more or less unmodulated, colour—colour more brilliantly luminous than anything else in modern painting. And colour was released in this way in the paintings of Matisse long before it was in those of Picasso. But Matisse's objects are less interesting in themselves —regarded as isolated inventions—than Braque's or Picasso's. For this reason Matisse's canvases are almost naturalistic compared with the canvases of Braque or Picasso, and always have been. But if Matisse was never so much an inventor of new forms, expressed in terms of plastic mass, he is the most original draughtsman of his age and he is, above all, its chief inventor of *new compositional rhythms*.

And I must say here that in this matter of composition I believe he has been a far more fertile influence than Picasso himself. Indeed I think Matisse exerted a decisive influence on the manner in which his two great contemporaries came to *compose* their pictures—the way in which they fill out the rectangle of the canvas. Braque and Picasso determined what sort of forms should become pictorial currency. But I feel that Matisse's great early discoveries, his fluency of line, his even, allover emphasis in design (and both were evident in his early Fauve paintings) were an immensely significant revolution, a most formidable influence, tearing even these two greatest of Cubists away from the naturalistic build-up of forms within a picture which they had, in all their Analytical Cubist works (1908-12), accepted from Cézanne, almost unconsciously, no doubt. The composition of most Analytical Cubist works by Braque or Picasso is thoroughly Cézannesque. One of the turning-points in the history of Cubist painting probably arrived in 1912, when Analytical Cubism—with all its exaggerated late-Cézanne planes running riot (like a snowstorm of soapflakes) around and in front of a *realistic arrangement* of realistic, three-dimensional objects—when all this developed into Synthetic Cubism. At that moment, a distorted realism turned into symbolism: a perceptual imagery of distorted planes was transformed into a conceptual imagery

consisting of symbols symbolic of objects in space. Would the transformation have occurred if the compositional freedom discovered by Matisse—the immediate effect of which was to enhance awareness of the value of the picture surface as a distinct and separate entity, entitled to a life of its own—had not been bestowed at precisely that moment? To-day, the figures, objects or symbolic images in Braque, Picasso or Matisse are all presented as flat symbolic silhouettes. This very flatness first showed itself, not in Analytical Cubism, but in the Fauve paintings of Matisse.

CHAÏM SOUTINE

Since the war I think there has only been one exhibition in London[1] to be entirely devoted to this strange painter, with his attenuated scullery-maids, his writhing landscapes and his very dead chickens whose stiff claws spike the air above them. If we think of the term 'Expressionist' in connection with Van Gogh and some of the early Fauve works, it can safely be used to classify Soutine as well.

Soutine was a Lithuanian by birth. He went as a youth to Paris. Like so many other gifted Europeans from beyond the French borders he sought the place where artistic ideas hung thickest in the air. In Paris he met the Italian expatriate, Modigliani—and it is Modigliani's influence that shows in almost every portrait and every figure-painting Soutine ever did. Of course, he has none of Modigliani's smooth textures; none of his almost symbolic simplification of the head and figure; none of Modigliani's explicit ovoid design, so precise in its sensitive delineation, so pathetically human in its psychological communication. I always think that the psychological penetration of Modigliani's doll-like portraits marks the incidence of real genius of a kind very rare in the art of the present century. The extreme simplicity of his pictorial means is baffling. Now, Soutine's portraits show little of this genius for expressing the sitter's personality. Where Modigliani's egg-shaped faces and hazel-nut heads somehow revealed a whole gallery of different individuals—each convincingly a person, convincingly different—Soutine's portraits force all his sitters into a common category. One feels that no matter whose exterior he happened to make use of, he simply *imposed* the same frantic gloom, the same spiritual malaise upon them all, reducing them all to a common condition of semi-lunacy—lorn, haggard and, of course, tubercular.

[1] At Gimpel Fils: 1947.

In other words, Soutine used his sitters simply in order to project himself: an expressionist in every sense, he sought to impose his own vision of themselves upon all things and people. From Soutine that marvellous tension which we find in most great artists is absent: I mean their ability to equate powerful subjective impulses with that insistent sensuous evidence which crowds in upon the mind from the world of external reality.

In Cézanne, a painter in many ways unsurpassed in the whole history of art, we can recognize a double revelation at every stage. At every moment his art reveals both himself and the visible, created world. There is not the slightest doubt that Cézanne was in a frenzy to 'express himself', as we say. But this explosive force within was never allowed to emerge neat and undiluted. It was never allowed to flood out on to canvas as a furiously incoherent slashing and stabbing of pigment. Cézanne opposed this interior surge by a desperate discipline—he forced it to express itself entirely in terms of images of the sunlit, exterior world—images which, in their turn, also presented themselves to him with an almost overwhelming force. Therefore, his art was an equation of two great streams of experience—one from inside himself; the other from outside.

Now Soutine was an artist who completely succumbed to the subjective flood. Even the lovely impasto of his violent paint is often rendered almost meaningless by an excess of fury, and scribbled richness. Nevertheless, it is his *paint* that is Soutine's real glory. It is by far the most original feature of his art. Here indeed he surpasses Modigliani. Modigliani's thin glazes are often patted too neatly on to the canvas. Sometimes they even verge on empty, stippled prettiness. But Soutine's rich mixtures and his too distortional brushwork are in fact, I think, partly an attempt to cover up a deep defect of imagination and vision. From the point of view of the actual structure of his portraits, Soutine did not add anything much to what Modigliani had already done. Underneath the broken and distorted surfaces, the swirling Prussian blues and brick-reds, the *form* of Soutine's figures is very nearly identical with Modigliani's skittle-shaped ladies and gentlemen. Both painters saw their models in the same way. Their sitters were rigid, upright dolls, immobile, seen frontally and placed neatly in the centre of the canvas. In vain Soutine tries to introduce interest into this unimaginative arrangement, this too symmetrical composition by means of an over-violent brushwork; but this is only a superficial distortion, a distortion in terms of brushwork, which goes no deeper

than the brushwork. It leaves the main too symmetrical forms undisturbed. For all his over-violent gestures with the brush itself, the real form of Soutine's sitters remained doll-like. Most of them, like Modigliani's, resemble an Indian club with the handle sticking up: sloping shoulders, and a long neck mounting to a diminutive head, or, alternatively, a head that is too big—like a turnip lantern on a stick.

You may feel I am overlooking Soutine's landscapes. But I think the same criticism holds for them as well. Houses cling at desperate angles to the sides of ravines—everything tips. The solid earth itself is far too convulsed to be really convincing in the long run *as* the solid earth. I enjoy these landscapes very much, but their unity is violated by so much 'dynamism'. Soutine seeks too consciously—or it may be too *un*consciously—for the natural dynamics of landscape. Such a desperate pursuit of the thrust and movement underlying the sunny hillsides of southern France defeats its own ends. If every undulation in the contours of the ground, if every knoll and every depression are magnified to an extreme degree, the scene will in fact take on the *even* appearance of a rough sea. In the end I find most of Soutine's landscapes come to have the kind of monotony one associates with a succession of big waves.

The faults I have been describing may perhaps be explained in another way. We might say that no painter is really successful in every respect—and this doesn't involve his ultimate stature: there are many levels of achievement at any of which an artist may realize himself completely—but no artist is really successful until he finds his *own subject*, a subject he can identify himself with completely. Soutine's portraits and landscapes have not got this profound inevitability. I think we only see the real Soutine in his grotesque still lives of dead birds—pendant, dripping chickens: glistening flayed hares, and so on. In these pictures everything works together to produce a horrible but magnificent image which we can never forget. Soutine is the Matisse of the macabre. With the wild joy of a *Fauve* he weaves the dance—the dance of hilarious, inordinate, insanely explosive colour! And under the mad whirl of pigment . . . gristle gleams: gleams, grimaces and groans.

FERNAND LEGER

D.-H. Kahnweiler, in his book on Gris, refers to Léger as one of 'the four great painters' who were responsible for the development of

Cubism—Braque, Gris and Picasso being the other three. Although I now agree that Léger is a remarkable painter, it would not occur to me to equate him with Picasso or Braque. My admiration dates from the moment, only a few years ago, when I saw some detail reproductions from a big, recent painting by Léger of bicyclists. These showed a close-up of a small section of the design: four pigeons, I think, defined by a flowing black outline, even in both its thickness and its blackness, upon a ground of whitish impasto. Reproduced almost to scale, one got the full quality of the brushwork in that detail photograph: its texture, which is both brutally energetic and beautifully suave and controlled, was in itself evidence of the hand (and mind) of a master.

There is nothing strange in this. A good painter is one whose work is dominated—*permeated*, rather—by a completely unique rhythm. Since this rhythm is inherent in all he does, it can be detected as certainly in the smaller as in the larger passages of a canvas, even when they are isolated from the whole. But if we study canvases from every stage of Léger's career, from the pre-Cubist *Corsican Village: Sunset*, of 1905, for instance, through the conventional Cubist works of the ten years from 1908 to 1918 to the utterly personal discoveries which have followed since, it looks as though this wandering, heavy line contains the essential Léger. I would call the majority of his works executed before 1918 'conventional' Cubism, because, while they are unmistakably contemporaneous with the Analytical Cubist works of Picasso and Braque, they are surely inferior to them. Things like *The 14th of July*, 1913, or *Still Life with open book*, 1914, are little more than decorative—so loose are they in structure, so summary in execution. And even a surprisingly delicate yet much-worked-out picture like *The Woman in Blue*, 1912, is no match, *plastically*, for equivalent Picassos—that is, Picassos of the same or a slightly earlier date. One has only to go to the modern French room in the Tate and compare Picasso's Analytical Cubist *Femme assise* or *Buste*—the most magnificent of the Tate's recent acquisitions—to realize Picasso's immense superiority not only plastically, but altogether as an easel painter. It was not until Léger abandoned the still Cézanne-inspired and essentially sculptural planes of Analytical Cubism in favour of a mode which employed large, flat and mostly geometrical patches of colour that his style began to crystallize. And from this point (about 1918) onwards this 'patterning' style has developed logically until Léger is sometimes referred to to-day as the modern master of mural painting.

Flat is a word with a score of meanings as applied to painting. If I

say that Léger's paintings are 'flatter' after 1918 than before that date, I do not mean that their total effect is, by comparison, a denial of space. I mean that whereas almost any piece in the design of a picture painted before 1918 (in *The Card Players*, 1917, for instance) was itself a plane tipping away from the picture surface, after 1918 most pieces of the design were simply flat patches of colour; that is, the planes they evoked were parallel to the picture surface. The limbs of the three soldiers in *The Card Players* are reconstructed as geometrical forms and these forms are then 'portrayed' realistically. The picture space is a deep hole, full of cylinders of every shape and size—torsos, forearms, fingers. Every shape is three-dimensional: nothing lies parallel to the picture surface, to the extent that it can be indicated by a flat marking off of a section of that surface. But the exact opposite is true when we come to the monumental and calm *Mother and Child*, of 1922. Here the very terms he uses to convey his spatial theme of a figure lying in a deck-chair across an open french-window are flat. A flatly coloured section of the picture surface is now the unit by which Léger creates his illusion of forms in space: there are no planes other than these differently coloured segments of the surface: but on account of differing colour and tone these sections advance or recede. It is this differentiation in depth between one flat patch and the next which creates that version of space that Léger has made his own.

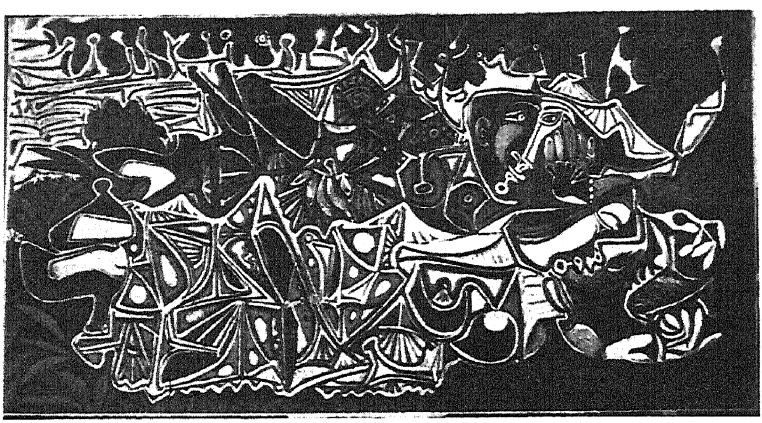
But there is, in *Mother and Child*, one other device for defining form in space, in addition to the juxtaposing of flat patches: the soft gradation of a light into a dark indicates rotundity. This most refined formal convention, in alliance with the sharp patchwork, provides Léger with at least half of his pictorial vocabulary. The other resources upon which he draws—and latterly they have been the most used—are linear.

In *The Dance*, 1942, the figures exist simply as great black outlines superimposed across dancing rectilinear strips and sheets of flat, pure colour which, in turn, lie scattered at various angles over an off-white ground. These heavily rhythmic lines wander, with the slow unnervous force of twisted ironwork, across the unmodulated areas of strident colour. His blunt, heavy brush is incapable of the electric finesse of Braque's elegant, firm touch; it cannot record the nuances of tone found in Picasso, nor does it register much variety in the texture of paint. The handling is remarkably even. Nevertheless, to one who has ceased to resist the heavy-fisted, didactic, 'public' nature of the vision, the very subtle quality of the skills in Léger's art becomes apparent. If you stay among such paintings long enough for the harsh-

ness of form and the acid, flat bleakness of colour to wear off, you may soon respond to their essential qualities—a virility of drawing, an immensely economical design and a *functional* use of colour that is extremely single-minded and brave. For subtlety in Léger is more intellectual than sensuous (though the details in the wonderful *The Forest*, 1942 (Plate 38)—tendrils and birds and insects—are superbly sensuous in their paint).

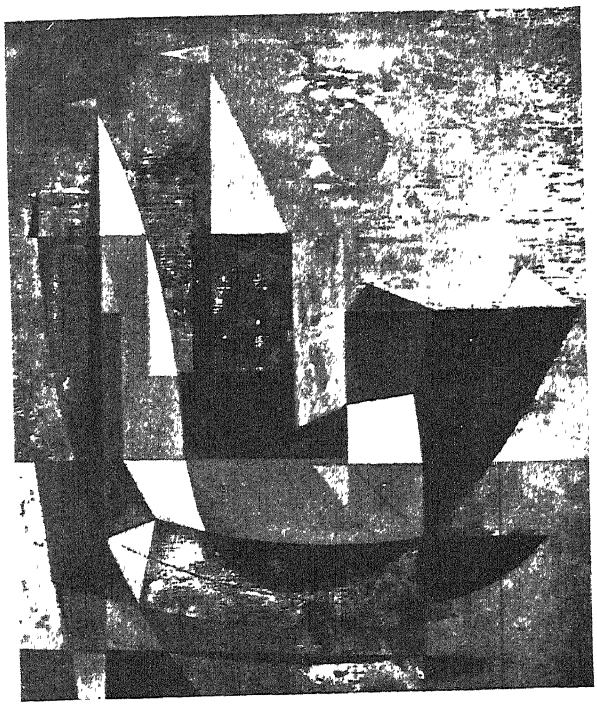
But the proof of Léger's greatness is not in the detail: it is in the immensely strong, slow beat of his pulse. The total configuration of each canvas is invariably complete, rounded off, full, and quite unlike anything else in the world. Is it perhaps possible to argue that his compositions are *too* complete? That this completeness is due to the habit of crowding all the forms in a picture towards the centre of the canvas, so that, again and again, no part of the design reaches out as far as the edges of the canvas? Latterly, Léger's composition resembles an *island* of forms surrounded by the 'sea' of the background plane. No forms reach out to touch the picture frame. This means jettisoning the compositional pressures which the frame normally exerts on the design of a picture. It indicates the mural-painter's state of mind. But it is already a compositional cliché with numerous younger French painters—Mathieu, Manessier, and a host of lesser men. In the case of Fernand Léger, however, we accept this habitual 'island' composition. It is his personal invention.

25 Pierre Bonnard: The Bowl of Milk

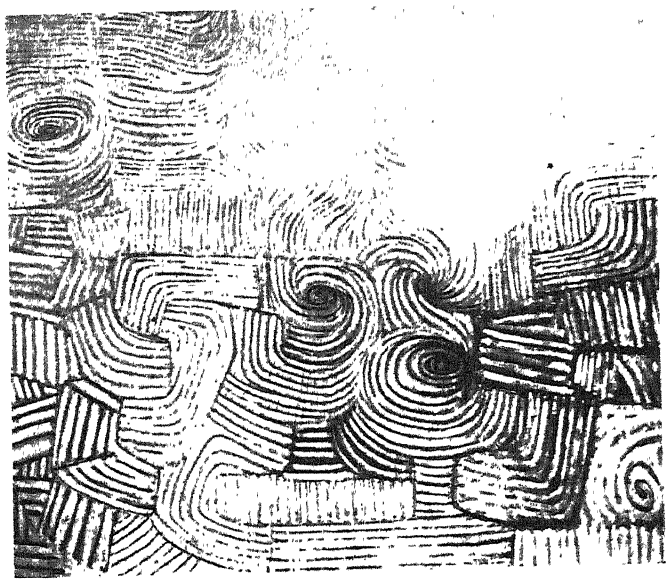


26 Pablo Picasso: Les Demoiselles des Bords de la Seine, 1950

John Wells: City Dawn. 1947

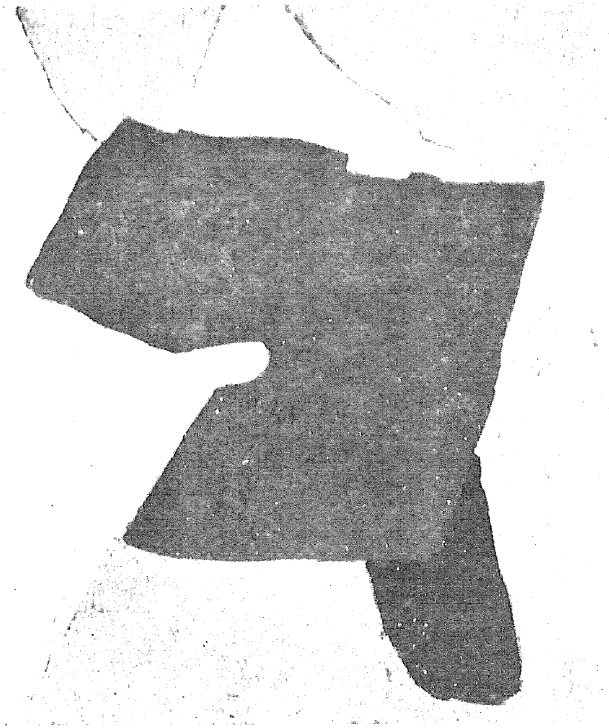


28
Victor Pasmore: Spiral Motif in Black and White —The Snow-Storm. 1950



29

29
Henri Matisse:
Large Interior
in Red, 1948



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30
Roger Hilton:
Painting, 1954

II

MODERN ENGLISH ROMANTICS

Graham Sutherland, Keith Vaughan, Bryan Wynter

It sometimes seems to me that the phrase 'Romantic Painting' is a contradiction in terms. In England we always hear a great deal about Romantic Art; Romantic Painters, it seems, are the sort of painters England must specialize in: even our arch-realist, Constable, is claimed as a great Romantic artist. I have no objection to Blake, Palmer or Fuseli being described as 'Romantic': their faulty pictorial equipment is obvious enough, and is therefore proof that that sort of Romanticism may breed a poetic inspiration, but not the means of painting. The opposition I feel is this: the Romantic spirit is a heightened *inward* awareness, an essentially introspective kind of imagination for which poetic fantasy is the natural outlet, or mode of expression. This fantasy, if not actually pessimist in orientation, is at least apprehensive, and the English have developed it into an unrivalled literature. And it *is* literature which provides the most articulate formal medium for this state of imaginative awareness. Painting, on the other hand, is essentially an *outward* looking art. The material of painting is the visual world: to contemplate—as a painter must—the outward appearance of things is to forget oneself and one's inward feelings; it is to project one's consciousness out through one's eyes, as it were, *into* the phenomenal world of light and air; of form; of space and colour. Space is the medium of pictorial expression: forms in space—the whole apprehended as colour—are the actual *content* of pictorial art. And plastic form, giving off the uniquely pictorial, uniquely visual

experience of space—plastic form is, by virtue of its very nature, robust, and essentially optimistic. Painting is optimistic—even when its 'subject matter' (in the case of certain forms of realism) is not optimistic. Picasso's *Guernica* or the horrors of Goya are not depressive in their effect upon us. We acknowledge the tragic implications of the subject of these works *at the same time* that we are uplifted by the sheer splendour, exuberance and—yes: I say it again!—the optimism of their faultlessly orchestrated forms. Such plastic force; such vibration of colour; such majesty of architectural orchestration as a great painter achieves are prime realities which exist as immediately for the spectator as the bombed baby, the screaming woman or the tortured hands that inform, so to speak, the forms. And they exhilarate.

In England, however, sensitive people respond to the second of these two realities (the 'subject'), to its mood and atmosphere, long before they show any signs of comprehending the first. The palpable realities of a painting—its form, its architecture of related forms, its actual colour and its organized spatial realities—these escape the majority of sensitive English spectators. Indeed, 'mood' and 'atmosphere' and 'sensitiveness' are the sole critical vocabulary of many painters and critics in this country (unlike Paris, where 'structure', 'texture' 'correspondence of forms' and so on are the instinctive vocabulary of the majority). My argument is not that what for the moment I will call 'the poetry' of a painting is an impermissible element: on the contrary, nothing that enters our total consciousness of life is barred from finding its entry into the art of painting. But what I do say is that this poetic or literary element is only properly expressed in pictorial form if it is expressed *in terms of* those pictorial realities I have just mentioned. You cannot, as so many English enthusiasts seem to believe, have a valid poetic content occupying a canvas the pictorial economy of which simply does not function. It seems to me that England always possesses a number of distinguished painter-poets who do not understand this. The poetry of disintegrating country mansions, of decaying tree-trunks, of a gloomy moor are clearer in their minds than that other poetry which painting alone conveys—the poetry of colour and form.

And now, presumably, I shall hardly surprise the reader if I confess at once that for me no painter in the whole history of British painting has meant half as much as Cézanne, or, for that matter, as Picasso, Braque, Matisse or Bonnard. I believe it is necessary for contemporary British painters to gain a more intimate knowledge of certain French

painters if they are to acquire the plastic means for giving their own poetry a pictorial form of real power and durability. It seems to me that, with a few notable exceptions, British painters have always tended to be lacking in pictorial science, but never in poetry. My feeling about Graham Sutherland, for instance, the most celebrated of contemporary Romantics, is precisely this: that his poetry is stronger than his pictorial means—and elsewhere I define an *expressionist* as a painter whose emotion (poetic or otherwise) is too intense for the pictorial means at his disposal, so that design cracks under the strain and disappears, and we are left contemplating

'*Undisciplined squads of emotion.*'

The distinction between 'pictorial science' and 'poetry' is, of course, a critical and not a creative distinction: that is to say, it is valid for a mind disposed to analyse but not for one engaged in the creative processes of painting. No painter attends consciously first to one and then to another aspect of his work, injecting a little 'plasticity' here, a little 'poetry' there. Just what kind of consciousness it is that the painter enjoys when at work will never be defined: or, rather, when it is defined, it will at once be apparent that although we have added one more definition to our knowledge, the thing we set out to know has simultaneously retreated beyond the new definition. However, in the attempt to state what I believe to be the characteristic weakness of British painting in general and Romantic painting in particular, it seems useful to oppose these two elements which in practice, I know, interpenetrate so subtly as to seem frequently identical.

By *poetry* I mean all the qualities of a painting which, as the result of analogy or association or mere imitation of appearances, enable the spectator to enjoy a vivid sense of realities that are external to the painting itself. Thus the poetry of a Bonnard may be concerned with the sense of physical well-being which we experience in the presence of sunlight: or it may be in praise of the beauty of a girl, or of the fruitful Earth, source of the subjects, the fruits and flowers, of his still lifes: or it may evoke the tranquil domesticity of a certain way of life. In communicating meanings of this nature, painting comes nearest to overlapping with literature, with poetry and prose. But the pictorial means of such communication are ends in themselves. The harmonious organization of colour and the architecture of forms; the disposition of each element in the interactive relationship of design and the special rhythmic character of the design of each canvas; in short, the 'abstract

glory of colour and form', all these are the exclusive characteristics of painting. It is to these things that the phrase *pictorial science* is intended to refer: all are enjoyable for themselves alone, in isolation from the poetic meaning which they also carry. At that moment in which we suddenly perceive and enjoy the new formal relations displayed in a canvas, we are quite unconscious of the 'subject' of the painting. On the other hand I think it is true to say that the character of the subject *suffuses*, as it were, our experience of the abstract relations and rhythms; but this is because the subject—with Bonnard if not with Gris—was largely instrumental in determining the character of the abstract rhythms and formal harmonies of a work. Indeed, I believe the most abstract configuration of colour, form and design has its own character, its own soul, its own *poetry*. But now I am using the word *poetry* in a second sense: now I am making it denote the power which abstract form and colour have for affecting us in a way which seems to have no relation to these abstract entities as such. For, after you have explored the form of a form and scrutinized the colour of a colour, there is still a quality or power in each which your exploration has not reached. Modern criticism has evolved a language for dealing with the plastic aspects of a work: but when he wishes to hint at the further powers which form and colour have, the modern critic starts introducing words like *metaphysical*. In this sense, *poetic* or *metaphysical* refer to whatever qualities of a work we apprehend but do not comprehend.

If I say that much British painting that lacks the pictorial science embodied in the central tradition of Western painting (a tradition resident in France, exclusively, for a hundred years now) is nevertheless not deficient in poetry, I am using the word *poetry* in the first of the two senses I have indicated above. British painters have often conveyed an intense feeling for the landscape subjects of their paintings; but at the same time they have often neglected to develop the pictorial means *for their own sake*. Thus the poetry of the subject has been conveyed at times when the poetry inherent in plastic form, in pictorial architecture, in design and in the organization of colour, has been completely missing. I can think of only five painters in our history (excluding the present) whose formal pictorial powers have been equal to their poetic powers; and who are therefore our only candidates for places in the Western hierarchy: Constable, Turner, Bonington, Girtin and Crome. Even Gainsborough lacked a plastic gift commensurate with his insight in other respects; while Hogarth, Wilson and the recent Sickert do not qualify for the front rank for

other reasons—with each there was (but in different ways) a rather too mechanical efficiency about his plastic evocation of form.

Inevitably, the question of Turner's Romanticism crops up here. Let us look at *The Needles* at the Tate; it is Turner's 'first exhibited oil-painting'. Two fishing-boats, one in a phosphorescent wave-trough; The Needles themselves, like shadowy icebergs, in the left background; the brightest of full moons above, in a light-filled, diamond-shaped rift in the dark night clouds. It is an astonishing painting; English in its intensely romantic feeling, but European in its pictorial science. An instance of this is the way the intricate reflections of light on the crests of near waves are managed: at first glance they seem merely a calligraphic display, a writhing of light strokes insufficiently evocative of the volume of the water Turner wished to define. But a moment later we realize that they do define the form of the waves; further, that they are an integral part of the whole pictorial scheme. They are, in fact, the most open statement of the zig-zag rhythm which is the formal basis of the picture. The moonlit part of the sea in this picture is an inverted triangle of pale light; this, in conjunction with the light part of the sky, becomes one big diamond-shaped area of visibility, filling most of the canvas, but leaving much toward the corners beautifully dark. Now all these features are abstract formal ones. And Turner, we find, gained his 'romantic' ends by way of the most dazzling manipulation of constructional form and design. This sort of composition, where attention focuses on an area in the middle of the canvas, is also natural to our most eminent modern romantic, Graham Sutherland, in all but his more recent works. There are a number of parallels between these two painters. For instance, Sutherland and Turner have the same impulse to resolve the receding ground of sweeping, open country into long shapes like slices of melon or a scimitar; both painters love a crescent; both 'falsify' the lighting of a landscape for subjective reasons; the mood or poetry of their landscapes is, in different ways, as powerful in its action upon us as their designs. Each painter also has a vocabulary of distorted forms which, evolved from natural forms in landscape, are neither realistic nor abstract.

I think they have a limitation in common as well. Neither is notable for the power of plastic design: they cannot convince us of the plastic character of an object with any economy; their forms are built up with elaborate textures, not swift gestures. Where they make them, their

quick statements mark the surface interestingly but do not also convey a conviction of space; to gain solidity and depth each must labour. This remark will seem nonsensical to those who think of Turner as supremely an explorer of aerial light and space. But is there not something perversely ideal, intentionally intangible, theoretically sublime about those late essays in atmospherics? That early painting of fishing-boats off The Needles shows a deeper love of the actual and is therefore more painterly.

GRAHAM SUTHERLAND

Graham Sutherland's art has been remarkable for the vocabulary of flatly drawn, opaquely coloured shapes with which he has described the forms of natural objects in landscape while at the same time evoking a world of internal fantasy. Untouched by Cubism, Sutherland made hills, trees and rocks resemble things seen through a microscope: a flowing linear imagery embodied all his forms, surrounding his harder objects with a rippling element reminiscent of the lymph surrounding and containing the corpuscles. Moreover, by typical acts of imaginative observation, natural forms were frequently resolved into the most affecting shapes; the bend of a road would be elevated, with extraordinary ease and naturalness, into that potent symbol—a crescent. And any round lump, a pebble or boulder, might, by his use of lighting, be made to illustrate a phase of the moon, a light and a dark side being sharply divided. Although he made pebbles into solar systems and his bracken slopes suggested the sections on a botanist's microscope slide, these paintings always evoked the atmosphere of our Celtic coasts intensely. Thus microcosm and macrocosm, so far from seeming far-fetched analogies, have actively assisted in the imaginative re-creation of Pembrokeshire.

It was in 1935 that Sutherland visited Pembrokeshire, and between that year and 1940 that he painted the series of landscapes—mostly very small in scale—which made his reputation and which remain, in my opinion, by far his best works. His particular bit of country is a small peninsula, rocky and barren and Atlantic-bounded. Dark and forbidding little coastal hills strewn with granite boulders and streaked with outcrops of rocky strata, the pre-Christian, Celtic atmosphere—common to Cornwall also—lay heavy over the place. Steep slopes plunged to a rocky shore and only here or there was there an odd patch of cultivation: a small, green almost circular field or so, sur-

rounded by the bracken and gorse slopes of the moor burnt black perhaps by heath fires. Besides the bracken, the gorse, the endlessly varied rock-shapes, loose and rolling or fixed and monolithic, nothing but an occasional pale granite cottage; the blackness of the little hills; and their sharp, near horizons, rock-complicated and treeless. Trees—if there were any—would not grow upright here, into tree-shapes; they would be clipped into streamlined rock-shapes by the Atlantic gales. Only bushes are sustained, gorse or hawthorn, by the poor blackish soil. To break the horizon, then, the painter would bring a thorn bush up near to him—right into the foreground: or would find two hedges, defining a receding lane, to stick up and pierce the skyline; or some gorse growing, apparently, out of nothing more nourishing than a pile of loose stones. Such forms as these he could use most dramatically: a sense of writhing, wiry growth amid sodden decay; live bracken shoots piercing up through dead peat, dead turf.

But whatever Sutherland painted—a bracken slope with rocks, with the sharp skyline of a small bleak crag in the background, and perhaps the crescent curve of a rough road, winding round a corner in the dark hillside, in the foreground—whatever he painted, Sutherland always evolved an imagery composed mainly of flame-like shapes. Hill, rocks, road, gorse, all tend to become flame-like and flowing in rhythm. The contours of the dark hill would writhe like black flames and the sky against which they would be seen might be of pure crimson—the crimson paint washed thin over the white canvas, which therefore shone through, creating a sinister luminosity. It is perhaps a curious thing, but one never thought of the crimson skies in such pictures as referring to sunsets or sunrises. It was always quite certain that these red skies—sometimes they were yellow, and even black or green—were an interpretation of ordinary daytime skies. The transformation of what are unquestionably blue or grey skies in nature into red or yellow ones in the pictures was an achievement of artistic intuition. It was a creative transformation, such as all good art accomplishes; and it worked. As an artistic-poetic comment on the natural scene, this translation of green hills into black dramatic lumps, and of daylight skies into a crimson swirl was, one felt, a revelation of some hidden aspect of nature. A hitherto invisible element in the commonplace had been made visible.

Thus Sutherland fused paint and poem. But I am thinking exclusively, I must confess, of the earlier rather than the later Sutherland. The Sutherland of these Pembroke landscapes—precipitations of a

purely Celtic essence: brooding, dark with a darkness that emanated from the hills rather than the sky: yet gay; electric in colour and in clarity of design. Although Sutherland's precise linear studies of such forms in nature as those of rocks, trees and the contours of hills were the basis of these dramatic early compositions, they did transcend the illustrative tendencies which he always shared with a host of lesser British artists but which, later on, he fell a prey to. It is a permanent feature of British painting, this literal eye of the illustrator, which cannot get inside the form of an object because it needs must dance across the surface of it, this way and that, always recording, recording, recording! Every insignificant detail! Samuel Palmer was really just such an artist: so was James Ward. And of course the Pre-Raphaelites took literalness—an aimless, copying attitude, which wallows in insignificant realism—to a truly unbearable pitch. Detail in the Pre-Raphaelites was there because it was elaborate, labour-absorbing, aimless and self-conscious.

But Sutherland, though his forms are always weak in a purely plastic sense, did, in those Pembroke hill paintings, achieve a breadth of treatment that gave the work real power. Nevertheless, even then he never *re-created* his objects fully—from the inside outwards: he went, in his Pembroke paintings, perhaps as far as one can go if, in the search for vital forms, one has made the initial mistake of building on the external properties of one's subject matter. It may sound paradoxical to say that an artist who is so far from appearing naturalistic nevertheless preserves as a sort of inviolable starting-point the visible skin of a tree-trunk or rocky boulder. But I think that is what happens in Sutherland: and it is surely a mistake. One feels that the artist, realizing that he has not fully re-created, transmuted, from inside, so to speak, his hill, tree, rock or road form—one feels that he has tried to inject more interest and complexity into these forms *after* they have already become registered on his canvas as flat images. One feels that Sutherland has elaborated—there on the canvas, rather than in his mind—the forms which come naturally to him, but with which he was dissatisfied, possibly because they were too naturalistic in drawing and in the spatial sequence they record. A bell-shaped hill; or a field like a tent, hanging on the side of that hill; a bush like a flame that sprouts from an engine's firebox; a small boulder lit from one side, like a piece of green cheese under a strong lamp.

These startling images are poetic: but they are nonetheless naturalistic in their actual delineation. We feel that that bell-hill or that tent-

field are merely engraved, as it were, on top of a dead image of hill or field. The reality, the hill itself, remains only partially discovered—only half explained.

But at this point I can imagine an interrupter saying, 'Stop! You are remorselessly applying one set of criteria—those of volume, plastic form, and organized space—in fact, the Cubist criteria. You are forgetting the ideographic values of the opposite school of thought. You are forgetting the non-Cubist, non-Latin approach of Paul Klee, or Kandinsky or Miró. But perhaps their ideographic values would provide a better yardstick in Sutherland's case?' Well, it is possible that Sutherland is a sort of English Miró.

It is true that modern European art contains two streams, two fundamentally opposed lines of development. One is the traditional Latin stream that was first Italian and later French. Much English and most Spanish painting also belongs to this stream: most German does not. For artists working within this tradition, the organization of volumes in terms of a spatial setting—that is the paramount achievement, bestowing the ultimate validity. It is the tradition in which plastic values predominate: and it extends into the present along two routes: by way of Cézanne and the Cubists; and by way of the Fauves.

Now the opposing stream—the Klee-Kandinsky-Miró stream—is almost totally unconcerned with such things as an evocation of space, or of the volume of three-dimensional form. What such artists seek is the creation of an image of affective power—however flat, however arbitrary in its relation with the other images in the design. And usually design is more an affair of isolated single images jumbled together in a roughly pleasing, roughly decorative manner. There is no compositional power; no architectural organization of interrelated forms in the canvases of Klee, Kandinsky or Miró. Everything floats. The pictorially active space is a vacant flatness which may soon fill up with one potent little creature, one effective doodle after another, in much the same way that an empty field fills up with different flowers as May comes on. Or in much the same way that the evening sky slowly deepens and fills with stars: some, lonely; others in constellations, patterns, configurations which at once take on an associative power—a man with a belt and sword—or something else. Did I say this ideographic school denied *space*; all space? I was wrong. But space in the Cubist or Fauve camps is sensuous space: space as it is known to our senses. And English readers may think here of Matthew Smith, the English Fauve; or of Wyndham Lewis, the English Cubist (or

Vorticist—as he called himself over thirty-five years ago); or, again, you may think of the marvellous, lucid space in the near-abstract landscapes of Ivon Hitchens: in Hitchens, space is more actual, in the sense of being an element that can itself be touched, and sensuously *known*, than in any other contemporary British painter. The willow tree and the pond are both *there*: but space itself is even more forcibly present to our senses in Hitchens. It obtrudes between us and this or that recognizable object. In Hitchens the air is space and the space is air: objects are flattened out simply under the pressure of space itself.

But whether in Hitchens or Matthew Smith, or in Braque himself, the Latin, Cubist space is space as it is familiar to us; as it envelops us in our everyday settings. And by contrast with all this—space in Klee or Kandinsky is non-sensuous; it is mental; we might say metaphysical.

So we oppose the plastic stream to the ideographic. Now, if Sutherland was more definitely either one or the other I should not be making this criticism of him. The trouble is, he gives us images which are alternately plastic *and* ideographic: and that alternation occurs not only between pictures, or between one image and the next: but within a single image. This fatal ambiguity lies at the heart of his figuration, and bedevils it.

After the Second World War Graham Sutherland went to paint in the South of France, on the Côte d'Azur: a practice he has kept up at regular intervals ever since. The change of scene marked a great change of style. With these Riviera pictures the subject, of course, was changed. Writhings of gorse or bracken gave way to jagged 'palm palisade', glass-sharp vine leaves and baroque banana leaves. The soft blacks and delicate vibrant alizarins and emeralds of earlier works—they were transparent stains, not 'body colour'—were now replaced by opaque, 'dead' surfaces of intense yellow, orange, scarlet, pink and a pale electric blue-green. Greys and off-whites began to abound in place of the Celtic blacks which the Mediterranean light had routed. And these new pictures were also unlike his earlier ones in that they were no longer black-and-white in conception. Questions of tone, quite new to Sutherland, and of the space that tone generates, were now forced upon him for the first time. Now white was mixed in with most of these new colours and the device of a white ground shining through a thin wash of colour—for gaining luminosity—was practically discarded. In his earlier works depth, or distance, would be suggested by line, never by plastic tone. The forms of, say, a hilltop in the upper part

of a canvas would be as strong in colour, as black or as red, as a stone or tree-trunk in the foreground. To imply depth, this linear design invariably created a series of receding loops, the whole composition forming a circular arrangement, or two circles interlinked. The corners of his canvases were thus usually empty except for some corner-filling detail. A further reason for the corners of his pictures (of whatever period) remaining empty is his non-pictorial, his sculptural notion of form. Again and again a 'sculptural' form or complex of forms occupies the centre of the canvas—leaving all the edges to take care of themselves.

Sutherland himself was now at a half-way stage. He had abandoned circular composition. He was now placing a cluster of sharp vine or palm forms, which have the old circular rhythms, against a hard, opaque flat background, divided into rectilinear or triangular facets suggesting a wall. Even when this background was actually sky, it *felt* like a wall or screen—hard and near. 'Space' in Sutherland's work, as in that of Gris, is always mental, rather than sensuous: we have to learn how to 'read' his three-dimensional meaning. The harsh clash of the flat backgrounds (they lay parallel to the picture surface) with the almost naturalistically solid plant forms was interesting (reminiscent of Grünewald via Picasso). But one felt that his interest in the vine and pergola—the curling surfaces of leaf; the engineering feats of stems spanning space—was somehow divorced from his interest in realizing the pictorial space as a whole.

If the permeation of his art by literary (surrealist-romantic) values rather than by plastic ones is a mark of his Englishness, then Sutherland is English. Certainly he is the most literary painter of distinction on the contemporary scene in this country. Without doubt he has little ability for controlling strong colour and even less for creating pictorial space. We were so excited to be offered a pictorial formula for our emotive Celtic landscape in South Wales that we failed to recognize that those designs are too flat, too schematic. His pictures suggest notes for painting; they have not the necessary degree of unity of space; they are not resolved into a single spatial whole. Even Klee gives us an *equivalent* for coherent space. Sutherland too often fails to recreate space at all. Thus he falls back on a compositional resemblance to the natural disposition of the forms in landscape: that is, his forms, though non-realist in themselves, are arranged in realistic order: thus, he arranges his re-created and, in themselves, often excellent images in an order which is a mere reproduction of the natural appearances in land-

scape—big objects in the foreground; middle-sized objects in the middle distance; small objects and a natural horizon-line in the background. Such an element of imitation is not present in paintings where the recreation of space is thorough and complete. Even Matisse and Bonnard (not among the most violently distortional of painters) know how to violate such a naturalistic sequence, making, for instance, a skyline come nearer than the frame of the window through which they look out at it. Nevertheless, Sutherland is an interesting and resourceful artist: presumably, his powers of purely pictorial organization may yet catch up with his power to evoke poetry. Already he has brought a new kind of material within the range of abstract expression: whereas Picasso's tendency is to abstract geometric from natural forms, Sutherland's units of abstraction are shapes resembling a flame, a thorn, an uneven molehill, a moth-eaten disc, a crescent. His abstractions hint at what might be called the rhythms of biology rather than geometry.

But there is another serious criticism one cannot help making. It is that his forms are always sculptural: they stand essentially in isolation, one from the next; he does not understand the nature of *pictorial* form, that quality of plastic weight which unites the forms in a picture, instead of separating them. There is no indication of that interplay between one form and the next which is the hallmark of good painting. Sutherland is conscious, first and foremost, not of a compositional pictorial unity, but of a number of loose, isolated, sculptural forms—whether of roots, or palm spikes, or 'thorn heads', or 'standing forms'—and these he shuffles together, often rather self-consciously, into an arrangement on the canvas. Strictly speaking, any form in a painting of his is, firstly, a poetic symbol; secondly, a rather flimsy sculptural object, whose three-dimensional reality is only partially realized; and lastly, an image in paint.

For the true painter this order would be reversed. He would be conscious, first of all, of the image *in* and *as* paint; conscious secondly of that paint-image's three-dimensional implications; and only lastly conscious, if at all, of the poetic symbolism or associations of his work. The true painter lives in his painted surfaces: he leaves the literary art-critics and the poets with an interest in painting to discover and proclaim the 'poetry' latent in his works. The glory of the pictorial art lies not in any poetry which it may or may not transmit: but rather in the final and absolute experience of formal grandeur, of that contrapuntal play of form upon form, colour upon colour, flatness upon flatness, depth of space upon depth of space. These are the

physical realities of painting. They are abstract—present *beneath* a representational façade, or surface, in all the great masters of the past. And they act directly upon our *bodies*, and not upon that part of our intellect which interests itself in the symbolism of a thorn. Given these realities, thorn-symbolism may be added. But it cannot precede them.

The large retrospective exhibition of Graham Sutherland's works which was arranged at the Tate Gallery in the summer of 1953 began with an early etching (according to a catalogue note, he made his 'first attempts at painting' when he was twenty-seven), and went on to include a number of the Pembroke watercolours, such as the excellent *Sun Setting Between Hills*, 1938. These tiny Celtic landscapes in watercolour are, in my view, Sutherland's most interesting achievement. They are often miniature in scale. And that is his true scale—six inches by twelve inches might be their average size—in terms of which he composes most naturally. Here he struck his most distinctive, most personal and inventive note. Here colour was resonant; though it was still inoperative as the agent of space. There was, even in these charming and memorable early watercolours, gouaches and, even, oils (*Small Boulder*, 1940, is another beautiful little picture), an unresolved confusion between an extremely original surface organization and the forms in depth of hills, hedges and boulders. One always used to give Sutherland the benefit of the doubt about this. Perhaps he really was on the verge of discovering a fascinating new formal vocabulary, in which the relation of surface image (what is actually painted on the canvas) to space and form in depth (in an imagined space behind the canvas) would be a revolutionary one, not at first easy to read.

But it has turned out otherwise. Indeed, Sutherland ceased to attempt to formulate this new vocabulary when he went, soon after the war, to the South of France. Instead of working away at the problem of ridding his extremely original configurations (those flat segments of colour in the forms of sickle, lop-sided disc, crescent, clover-like leaf form, sword or flame form which I have already mentioned—as well as a lot of other intriguing shapes—all were typical of his invention until the war) of their disconcerting, because unintentional, spatial ambiguities, Sutherland tackled a new world of subject-matter. This new world—cacti, vine pergolas, palms, gourds—he increasingly depicted in terms of a stilted realism which had not the tension or actuality of real realism (pure observation) on the one hand, or the formal strength and veracity of the formally re-created on the other.

From this period on he has become increasingly confused, it seems to me, and very eclectic.

Abandoning the charming colour of his Welsh landscapes, in which hue was on the whole subdued, he has become more ambitious. From Picasso he has gathered that colour may be bright. But bright colour must be scientifically manipulated if luminosity is to be gained. And Picasso's luminosity is based on his science of pictorial space. (I hate returning *ad nauseam* to this spatial mania of mine: but in fact painting, being an art of illusion—forms not *on*, but as I say elsewhere, behind, or in front of, the canvas—is basically concerned with the evocation of space. Space is the very medium of its being.) Sutherland's canvases from 1945 until 1950 were immensely bright without being luminous or spatial. Nor has this essential quality been gained in the last three years, under the influence, to no small extent, of Francis Bacon. In his most recent canvases at the Tate, very subdued in colour, like Bacon, the much thicker paint, the silvery greys and dead olives still do not vibrate—as Bacon's vibrate—with the resonance, depth and harmony of good colour. What they do contain, however, are imagined, sculpturesque forms of poetic horror and surrealist phantasy. Graham Sutherland is unquestionably a man of extraordinary imagination. But the question is: what kind of imagination is this? I believe Sutherland's phantasy is essentially illustrational, poetic, non-plastic.

KEITH VAUGHAN

There is another contemporary English painter, younger than Sutherland, in whom the two elements—poetry and the pictorial realities—meet with more naturalness: Keith Vaughan. Vaughan's grip on plastic values is very impressive. At the same time his pictures are suffused by a wistful, Northern lyricism: poetry and design are one.

As late as 1946 Keith Vaughan could have been called a follower of Graham Sutherland. A tense, wiry, occasionally spluttering black line was common to both of them. And this line, dividing the picture up like a web or black net, was more important than any flat area of colour. Like Sutherland, Vaughan then worked in terms of a nervous linear network, rather than in terms of planes or of plastic colour (though his thought was, even then, nearer such terms than was Sutherland's). His pictures of this early period also shared with Sutherland that dramatic mood which can only be presented in terms of absolute contrasts of tone in adjacent forms—or in adjacent areas inside the same form. The

Vaughans no less than the Sutherlands, of 1945 and earlier, were therefore essentially a sort of ragged patchwork of very light and very dark areas. What bound all these patches together, what in fact created them in the form in which they were presented, was the electric, insistent network of the drawing. And of course this linear character in either artist was something typically English in origin. Sutherland introduced line as a prime factor in determining composition, at a time when most reputable painters here and on the Continent were engrossed in the manipulation of planes and the organization of masses;[1] although line was an equal partner with mass and plane in Picasso's *Guernica*, for instance.

However, even in those distant days of 1945 Vaughan differed from Sutherland in many respects. Whereas Sutherland had at that stage barely admitted the human form into his landscapes (he had not allowed any animal to perambulate among his crag-like molehills) Vaughan quickly showed us that his own interest in landscape was as much an interest in it as a setting for figures as for itself alone. It is a possible criticism of Vaughan's landscapes of any period that they tend to have the aspect of 'a setting'—not necessarily a stage set: but still a background, a formal setting for action of some sort. What is this action? There was a moment when it was the lighting of a cigarette. Some of Vaughan's best pictures, painted perhaps in 1945 or 1946, were constructed round the subject-matter of two workmen 'lighting-up'. And with such paintings as these he became aware—so it seems to me—of his personal formula for the first time. It was not the landscape as such—which in Sutherland's case is the receptacle for mystery, for cosmic and microcosmic speculations—but the *figures in landscape* which first provided Vaughan with his clue. In Sutherland the landscape itself was the most alive of all his ingredients and the figures of his miners were essentially additions (rather academic ones, at that) introduced quite arbitrarily into the breathing, pulsating caverns of his mines, whose walls were like walls of flesh. But with Vaughan the opposite is the case. He found his excitement in the formal complexity of two figures, one seated, one standing, perhaps. And indeed one may say that he even found his *landscape* in the limbs of those figures—because *they* are what chiefly expanded under his touch. Rolled shirt-sleeve (in front) flowed into quarry-face (behind).

[1] In the art of Picasso, line plays an important part: but it has neither a dominant nor a subservient rôle in relation to mass. Line, in Picasso, is thus a plastic, as well as a linear, agent.

But next Keith Vaughan began casting off his Sutherlandish habits of linear construction and seeking more and more to express himself in terms of a more spacious configuration (and of course the sort of linear design which Sutherland extracted from Palmer denies spatial composition of any great profundity). We witnessed Vaughan beginning to turn towards Cézanne, Matisse and the Cubists. This was not quite such a jump as it sounds at first—because underlying the linear drawing of his Sutherland period Vaughan had always preserved a framework of form that was basically rectilinear and not, as in Sutherland, baroque. He was an incipient Cubist from the start. And so we were not taken completely by surprise when great flat sheaths of emerald green began to emerge out of the masses of his trees and to float, more or less free of one another, in space. But the Sutherland *mood* often persisted, even when the landscape was entirely reconstructed in rectilinear terms such as these.

I said that Matisse was an influence: I am thinking of a series of interiors, usually grey or dull olive in scheme, in which nude male figures sit about amongst very sparse furniture: bare tables may be adorned by a large candlestick, a blue jug and a pomegranate or two. I think Matisse's influence shows in the drawing of the figures, in the way in which the thick but sophisticated outlines are related to the broad areas of colour which they enclose, and in the general functioning of that colour. Vaughan is not using colour in a Cubist manner here, in these interiors (and by now, in this argument, I have caught up with his work as it was exhibited in 1951). He is not using it to create a plane so much as to *fill in* a plane. And that is Matisse's use of colour—if we also add the element of 'poetic colour'. I mean that Matisse, like Van Gogh, is interested in the intrinsic poetic evocativeness which different colours possess: the redness of red, for instance, is a poetic factor which Matisse employs; it is quite distinct from the other uses he may have for colour; its descriptive use, or its precise spatial evocativeness, for instance. Vaughan also is aware of the value of each colour for its own sake—or rather, for the sake of what I have just referred to as 'the poetry of colour'. His harmonies in greys, olives, rust reds, pale blues, khaki and walnut browns, blacks and sharp apple greens have their own special character. In fact, I think his colour is possibly more instinctive than his composition: one feels he has to think hard about the layout of each canvas: whereas, possibly, the colour 'just comes' to him—and the drawing too is free: and very efficient, very economical.

In his exhibition in 1951 Vaughan was trying out several things, all relatively new for him. He was in one instance harking back to analytical Cubism, in an extremely able exercise involving a sitting figure: this was a sort of muscle-developer, enabling him to discard the linear altogether in favour of the plastic. Here he was certainly creating *volume* by means of *planes*. But the result was more than an exercise—it showed much of that interest in the subject which is found in his best work. Then, in a new series of interiors with figures, there was an almost Cézannesque concern with texture *inside* the outlines of the figures. This disappears largely when the figures are transported to a beach. I think these beach scenes are the most successful paintings in his 1950-51 period. I know he has borrowed boats and cliffs, to some extent, from Braque. But they are organized like landscapes, with a spatial sense of a middle distance and a horizon and not, as Braque's landscapes are, like a still life. Again I find these pictures succeed in balancing Vaughan's two strongest and somewhat disparate tendencies: his newly emphasized concern for plastic form, on the one hand; and his very English love of a more illustrative, a more romantic idiom on the other. He has succeeded in steering clear, in his later work, both of illustration and of academic cubism. I think if he has a danger to beware of it is that he might content himself too soon with this attractive and very personal amalgam of these two opposed interests. But if so—he has succeeded in avoiding it so far.

BRYAN WYNTER

Bryan Wynter, the youngest of the three artists with whom this essay deals, may safely be described as a Romantic Landscape Painter. This suggests a style that is probably extinct outside this country to-day. The majority of the painters whose reputations have been made in France or America since 1945 are non-figurative, in some mode or other ('non-figurative' does not connote a single style, of course: post-war non-figurative styles are already numerous and varied). One cannot think of a landscape painter among them. In Italy, on the other hand, there are painters of landscape such as Afro and Santomaso—calligraphic abstractionists who have something in common with our own Ivon Hitchens. But if we add *romantic* to our landscape painter's necessary qualifications—then he will only be found in Britain. The occasional gaunt landscapes by young French neo-expressionists such as Bernard Buffet or Raymond Guerrier are the nearest thing in France

to-day to what we mean, here, by romantic landscape painting. Yet, for all their tasteful bleakness, Buffet and Guerrier do not communicate the autonomous moods, the overriding poetry of hills, fields, woods or seacoast. Their landscapes have the bones of a still life: metropolitan rhythms, strictly vertical and horizontal, dominate their beaches and meadows. The surge of the geological is nowhere in evidence. Of course, if we go to the older generation in France there is Vlaminck. And I think that Picasso's paintings of Vallauris made in 1950 and 1951 —in particular the magnificent *Winter Landscape:* 1950—or Braque's series of beach, cliff and sand-dune paintings, usually with boats pulled up on the shore, made roughly at the same time, can be said to operate upon our sense of place and to evoke our nostalgia for a particular *genius loci*: Braque's beaches, near Varengeville or Dieppe, might belong to the southern shores of our own island.

And is not the evocation, and celebration, of *the particular, in place and in time*, the mark of the romantic painter? His chief preoccupation is with whatever assails the senses in a given moment at a given point. We do not *have* to think of a round, oversize Harvest Moon pushing up over the darkly embroidered rims of elm trees and casting its light along rows of silent corn stooks: there are other moments and other scenes. But the romantic concentrates upon communicating that which the moment of perception itself encompasses. Everything of which I am conscious—*now!* at this second! The romantic artist or poet photographs the emotion of one moment in time—'the moment in the rose garden'. For this reason there is no searching or prolonged exploration of form: nor is an emphasis upon structure or design (and design is structure translated onto the flat surface which becomes a picture) pre-eminent in the work of a romantic painter. Mastery over such formal elements as these is acquired by the romantic simply in order to paint at all. But his passion is elsewhere—and not in this grammar of colour and form. And perhaps one reason why one tends to assume that the romantic landscape painter is a product of northern, not southern, Europe lies in the fact that 'the moment'—any one moment—is likely to reveal the landscape, in England for instance, under a different light, in a different mood, from what it was in the moment before, or will be in the moment after. There is no *constant* light: and *only* a constant light, such as prevails in Provence or Italy, is conducive to the creative study of pictorial form, as distinct from the mere manipulation of a formal vocabulary that has been inherited; or imported.

Bryan Wynter's formal vocabulary he has received direct from the

Cubism of Gris, Picasso and Braque—perhaps in that order. This is not an unusual inheritance for an English painter of his generation (he was born in 1916). What is unusual is the extraordinary ease and mastery with which Wynter speaks this language. His Cubist-educated eye analyses the chosen Cornish terrain of moor and cliff, cromlech-strewn hill-line, wall-threaded cliff-tops, lane-linked stone cottages with the deft certainty of a brilliant pianist unfolding the patterns of Bach. Where Braque splits a table-top into a light and a dark half, Wynter splits a whole hillside, or a cottage roof, or the great Atlantic Ocean itself. Where Gris runs a taut, rippling outline round a carafe, Wynter floats the linear silhouette of a piece of derelict mine machinery onto the textured surface prepared to receive it, a surface mottled like moss, or a lichen-covered granite boulder. Where Picasso constructs a girl by precariously balancing a breast on an arm, a shoulder on a breast, a face-profile on a shoulder, a nostril on a lip, and two eyes over one nostril, and so on, Wynter constructs a Cornish seagull with both eyes in its greatly enlarged upper beak, its small cranium crunched in its own maw, its neck reaching up from its boat-like body like a submarine's 'snort' (or a ship's ventilator funnel); its wide-apart legs straddling the strand like the concrete piers of a modern bridge. In other words, Wynter's formal inventiveness is an extremely agile and accomplished one.

Nevertheless, it is not here that his main quality lies. He is less of a formal *innovator* than another painter from St. Ives, Peter Lanyon, precisely because he is so able a practitioner in a known formal idiom—which Lanyon never was. Wynter is clear, precise, articulate and resourceful where Lanyon is original, clumsy, sometimes fumbling, always searching. No: it is their haunting accuracy of mood rather than their brilliantly lucid yet complex design that gives Bryan Wynter's Cornish landscapes their real distinction. No one else has so conveyed the bleak, bony, stony mysteriousness of the Celtic moors—the moors, in his case, beyond St. Ives, at Zennor, Morvah or St. Just. An observer, always, of the skeletal, he proves analogies between the remains of a curlew (or other inhabitants of the gorse and rocks) and the horizontal layers of wind-excavated outcrops of granite that preside on every crest or crag of the Cornish peninsula at its western limits. Bird-into-cromlech; cromlech-into-mine-chimney: mine-ruin-into-dry-wall-field-pattern; and field-pattern (like a fish-net over the landscape) merges into an explosion of hawthorn branches; or is regulated and checked by the reminder of horizontal-vertical order

which an iron field-gate imposes. A cock crows. The skies crack, their flat blackness emitting a trail of blue baroque smoke (for a cloud-trail). The squat, tipping church tower catches, suddenly, the lemon shaft of mad light from a hidden sun or moon far out to sea somewhere. A neat cottage, with chimney at either end, like ears, and two square, white bedroom-window eyes is suddenly there, up on the skyline of the near, dark, small, streamlined, rock-infested hill. A hurrying black wind off the sea muffles the owl in the gorse.

Until about 1952 Bryan Wynter worked in gouache almost entirely. No English artist living excels him in this medium, especially where it involves the process known as 'monotype'. He knows how to pull paper off a glass slab, upon which paint and ink are spilt or drawn, in such a way that the veins of a pressed blob of colour can be instantly read as the veins, or strata, in rock—the rocky cliff in the picture. Yet this is a slighter medium than oil-paint and Wynter has latterly started a grand assault on the 'weightier' medium. He has also become far more abstract. If in his new work he can retain the lyrical sense-of-place that his more figurative gouaches transmit, while increasing their plastic force and sheer pictorial energy, Bryan Wynter will have transcended the illustrative and harnessed the abstract.

12

PAUL NASH

PAUL NASH was an English artist who continues to hold our interest in spite of a number of grave pictorial deficiencies. Though we gain a clearer notion of what these faults and inabilities are each time we see his pictures, our main sympathies are scarcely affected: inadequate pictorial means, though they explain the tentative structure and tepid colour of his canvases, have not obstructed the transmission of imaginative ideas of a poetic nature. Paul Nash was an imaginative painter who will be seen more and more, as time goes on, to have left a distinctive mark upon our tradition. One stresses the fact that he was an English artist because, in an age that is often cosmopolitan in its art, what Nash did is as surely linked to the most native of our graphic practices—our landscape painting in watercolour—as it is to the best modern idiom of the French. Other writers have pointed out how Nash, in so far as his art possessed literary and illustrative qualities, had maintained a peculiarly English art: we have always excelled in illustration. But just how this literary element managed to co-exist with the particular plastic and formal qualities which are also manifest in his pictures; just what relation the purely poetic elements —and Paul Nash was emphatically a poet—bore to the strictly pictorial ones has not been investigated; or, not as fully as it deserves. All I am attempting here is a brief examination of this question of the interplay of poetry and design in Nash's work. It is as well to know whether what we are moved by in a particular instance lies in the categories of poetry (or, as Roger Fry would have said, literature) or within the pictorial categories; for Nash is an artist with whom 'the

subject' is all important, and, although I maintain that, as often as not, we are moved by both categories at once, we should notice the way in which the poetry of subject-matter operates upon the abstract nature of the form, modifying it and very largely determining its character.

If we judge by the highest standards that modern art can supply (by those emanating from Paris), and consider Nash's painting against the best of our day, we must conclude pretty quickly that he is a minor figure. Simply from technical points of view his inferior powers and even amateurishness are pronounced. Colour was, of course, by far his weakest point: he had no notion of its full and proper use: nothing that he ever did (in oils) *glowed*, in the sense, the painterly sense, that different colours, in powerful strife, can operate upon each other magically, so that an effect, differing from all the individual colours present, is not even the sum of those ingredients but a miraculous new fact. If a master of oil-paint wishes to communicate a certain grey-blue—the wistful no-colour of an English November tea-time—he will know how to express the wan, grey tone without resorting literally to wan, grey paint. Do not ask how! Every painter differs where such method is concerned: indeed, it is no method if its articulation in words is the criterion. But somehow a strength of colour, a richness and intensity of opposing hues, and, as well, of varying textures, is the sign of—not mastery, but simple proficiency; there should never be *actual* greyness, actual dullness of colour, as in Nash's biscuity landscapes, with their mixtures opaque and muddy. The colour itself should rejoice, locally and minutely as well as in a broader harmony of the whole canvas. Harmony is present in the bleakest pictures of a master: even a 'pocket-master' like Whistler could spell greyness with the brilliancy of true colour; luminous, though dark. But easily the most remarkable example, in recent times, of the bleakest material being handled in this vivid way is Picasso's great *Guernica*. Here, indeed, the actual mixtures are literally *black*, *grey* and *white*, with no other tone or colour to relieve them; simply these three even mixtures to juggle with. Such a discipline would almost certainly produce, at best, an anaemic and brittle design in other hands, but Picasso's mural was, from a purely *visual* point of view, gay, and very exciting; every part of the surface exhibited a novel interplay of these three colour-tones; was animated and organized in the extreme, and produced what, for all the lack of *hue*, was an effect of intense *colour*.

Another defect of Nash's lay in his actual handling with the brush. A stiff sort of hatch stroke monopolized his expression, and the calli-

graphic element in brushwork (one that easily degenerates into a sloshing bravado in those that are too conscious of possessing it) seemed almost absent from his repertoire of touches. These were deliberate, and sometimes stodgy; one felt he could record no sudden gestures, either in the definition of his forms, or of a more purely expressionistic nature (the sudden zig-zags that Cézanne would let loose outside the silhouette of a form that he had hammered with strokes of greater restraint is an example of the latter kind; and Derain often enjoys long, tense brushstrokes which, while defining with brilliant sureness, have also the electricity of sheer *expression* in them). One felt Nash's contact with the canvas was limited to certain familiar strokes and touches. Not so the watercolours, however. In those, nothing that I have just said holds true: learning much from Cézanne's marvellous essays in this medium, Paul Nash's watercolour strokes fell down like snow upon the paper, and were, in silence, wedded to it; for in these pictures bare paper almost predominated and was *used* by the artist to the utmost.

Comparison, then, with such painters as Derain, Picasso or Matisse shows Nash up as a very insular artist and one whose technical equipment was certainly deficient. But the strange fact is that all this does not in the least diminish our interest in him; nor does familiarity with important Cubist works (the very works that exerted the strongest influence upon him when, as a young man, he arrived at his first true and personal expression in pictures of 1917 No-man's-land) extinguish the genuine flavour which his work has for us. My own experience in the case of Paul Nash is shared, I find, by others of my generation, and so I might as well record it: I was fascinated at the discovery of Nash's landscapes at an early age and they monopolized my horizon until I was suddenly confronted by my first Cézanne. But so instant was my enthusiasm for Cézanne and so strong was my allegiance to him that, for about ten years, Paul Nash (the superseded!) never entered my consciousness: it is only with the recent breakdown in the Cézanne monopoly (still autobiography, only) that I have been free to reconsider Nash. (Perhaps I should say here that I still regard Cézanne as a painter unsurpassed in European history: but a monopoly of this sort is ended when additional interests are admitted at all!) What I now find, looking back at Nash, is, as I have said, an artist of peculiar power and distinction. So far in this short essay I have not explained why Nash makes this positive impression upon me; and this is what I must now attempt.

I think Ezra Pound somewhere expresses the view that the only adequate definition of the *subject* of literature is 'the whole of human consciousness'. But this is also true of painting: painting contains elements that refer to, and derive from, almost any human activity one can think of. Of course, one cannot admit this if one values one aspect of the art exclusively: if, for instance, one takes one's stand upon 'significant form', and denies the *illustrative* function altogether, one is cutting out the 'literary' range of pictorial art: and again, if one imagines that that—the recording, or story-telling function—is alone valid in painting, one will suppress all the *immediate* values of *the created thing*, the picture itself, with all its plastic, colour and composition values; with all its silent music of design; all the abstract splendour which awaits the contemplative eye. Painters and the more ardent and profound lovers of painting are naturally prone to dismiss the former category in their awareness of the actuality of the latter. And indeed it is in colour and form that the beauty and power exclusive to the art of painting reside: without these, art would assuredly *be* literature, or drama, or poetry. Nevertheless, the element of literary meaning lurks always, if not above, then below the surface of pictorial art.

This literary meaning that is interwoven will correspond, in a given picture, with one or another of the literary modes: a picture can be a running commentary on the traffic of a great city, as well as an account in prose of its architecture and general layout—Canaletto. Or it can be a prosy description of a landscape in which text are set short lyrics upon certain features of the view—Gainsborough. Or the whole can be a single poem with a single landscape for its subject—Constable and Turner. The literary element in Paul Nash is unquestionably poetry too.

Naturally, it is a poetry to which those who know Wiltshire (Avebury); the Downs, there and in Berkshire; the sea-coast near Rye or Dymchurch; the rich variety of trees in a Kent park or in Russell Square; and certain London scenes (St. Pancras Station Hotel, for instance) will be particularly susceptible: we English will obviously have the easiest access to the dreamworld of an English painter-poet whose subject is an English landscape. Nevertheless, the distinguished dreams of Paul Nash do not depend alone upon the subjects they make use of, these landscapes which they resurrect from memory before our eyes, for their power to move us. There is also their formal logic; the power of created form, and of a variety of forms in association. There

is the compulsion of those particular variations of 'cone, cylinder and sphere' which the sensibility of Paul Nash used in order to describe the natural forms of trees, stones, downs, sea and sky. Perhaps I should say that his forms were used to *re-create* these natural objects; for Nash was often not so much describing the landscape as describing something else to which the landscape gave rise in him.

But it is just here, on the subject of Nash's forms, that there is something paradoxical. Although I have only implied it, it was (amongst other things) in his conversance with the *formal* language of painting that Nash appears inferior to the modern masters in France. On the other hand, I stressed the poetic meaning—some might call it the *content*—of his work. From this it rather looks as though I thought that the formal aspect of Nash's work was less potent, less successful than the poetic aspect; that his forms were at best, perhaps, an indifferent means employed to communicate what was primarily a poem. But this is most emphatically not the case: to insist that his pictorial science and dexterity were not of the first order is not to deny what remains the chief characteristic of his painting, which is simply this: that form and poetry are almost identical in his pictures; the poetic feeling determines the shapes, informs the form, which in turn gives off the poetry of the original emotion again, *directly*, and not simply as the result of processes of association. Thus Nash's strong nostalgia, his intense sympathy with what is wide, bare, sweeping, wistful and grey in the landscapes of southern England, this is directly embodied in the long torpedo-like forms that serve him as clouds or the foliage of beeches; or in the smooth inverted cups that he modulates and complicates until they have the semblance of the interfolding Downs. Again, similar feelings find expression in a play of simplified perspectives: tubular tree-trunks are drilled into an avenue which leads with accentuated sharpness to an unnaturally early vanishing-point: or a ladder left leaning against an orchard tree, similarly distorted into a symbol of perspective, is also expressive of this strange, strong feeling of something infinite. These are examples taken at random, but they illustrate this identity of mood and poetry with form which one always finds in his work.

The paradox in Nash, then, is this: those elements in his art which are most potent, most genuinely moving, namely the *forms* which his vision supplied for the purpose of bodying forth his poetic intimations concerning a visual world—these same forms are, from the angle of pictorial tradition, the very objects of our criticism. The elongations,

the tubularities, the hard metallic surfaces bestowed on earth and tree, curving tensely like curving tin or turned wood, the angularities so expressive of structure—all this is excellent and no English painter of his generation showed more genius in this, the distortional and, therefore, the most creative side of painting. Paintings by Burra and Wadsworth seem positively machine-made, trivial, by comparison: even Wyndham Lewis, whose plastic vigour is quite equal to Paul Nash's, seldom succeeds in charging his constructions with as open and veritable a *meaning* as that which inheres in Nash's best work. Each of these painters possessed powerful means, as English artists go; each had the power of original plastic construction at the disposal of his vision. Where Nash gains is in the very simplicity of his attitude, in his frank assumption of the rôle of 'nature-poet', a rôle which the greatly complicated intellect of Wyndham Lewis would surely never permit its owner to assume.

But at the same time we have a very real criticism of these forms themselves—forms that sprang from Paul Nash's imagination; forms wistfully distorted to the order of a nostalgic nature-poetry. It is that their rendering remains so naïf; they are innocent of the wonderful lies and glamour that the hand of a great painter invariably utilizes in conjuring up his images, and evoking his forms. If Nash had used *colour* half as well as Matthew Smith, his *forms* would have gained immeasurably in vitality and conviction. But his colour is flat in its very conception: the fact that, as Cézanne announced, colour and form are identical to the painter, in that the fullest achievement of either means, automatically, the complete attainment of the other as well, is an indication that Nash was struggling to express form without availing himself of half, at least, of the means that are at the painter's disposal. The wonder is that he succeeded as well as he did in conveying plastic thought.

Even so, we return to the reflection that our ability to recognize and respond to Nash's subject-matter is not necessarily a measure of his pictorial power; it is proof more of his gift as poet or dreamer than as painter. A test is to notice whether the place a landscape depicts, or the objects and setting of a still life, remain more certain in the mind than the design, the texture and handling of the painting itself. Sometimes, I am afraid, one must say that they do; so far from a unique image, or complex of images, rendered in terms of paint being uppermost in one's consciousness, one finds that one's fondness for Silbury Hill or a typical formation of beech trees gripping the chalky hillside has led one

to work one's way back past the obstacle of colourless colours or obvious design (making superficial use of Cubist discoveries) to the picture by Nash one is remembering.

All this, however, is not to say Paul Nash was a literary painter whose interest was exclusively in the subject—like Dali or Holman Hunt. It is rather to return to our diagnosis of the paradoxical nature of his pictorial achievement. I have already said that if he had been gifted in the single additional respect of colour I believe the whole character of his art would have been changed. One is aware in every painting that two distinct processes have gone on in his mind side by side, the first positive, the second negative. The first was drawing, the second a 'colouring-in' of the drawing. The first was all-important; it recorded his primary reactions; by means of it he created all that he did create. His spontaneous distortions, those elongated cigar-like clouds, those waves of curling tin, those tubular tree-trunks, hills like inverted baking-tins, foliage like torn or folded paper, those rigid avenues of well-drilled beeches, or poles of scaffolding which accentuate a perspective so steep and sudden that it becomes itself one more symbol, like his ever-present suns and moons—all this is presented without the assistance of colour, which influences its character not at all. Cézanne's dictum about colour and form being, in the final analysis, identical was not a piece of abstract theory but an assertion of fact. If one takes a Cubist still life by Gris, for instance, there is not one form which would not assume a different shape if rendered in a different colour: colour, by its hue and intensity, establishes a position for itself in space; adjacent colours operate upon it, and upon one another, to assist this creation of illusory space 'behind' the surface of the canvas. The colour of a form thus plays as decisive a part in the evocation of its mass, density and even its outline, as does drawing. A painter who thinks in terms of black, grey and white, whose thought, that is to say, is fully expressed without resort to vibrating areas of colour, is vastly handicapped in the struggle to create the volume of form and space. He is likely to overtax mere drawing as such, to overemphasize the thrust and direction of his forms, thus isolating them each from each and making individual forms too closed-in, too little able to introduce us to the other forms in the picture. Every part of a picture should point us to a number of other parts just as each form should be affected by, even 'distorted' by, its neighbours. This hardly occurs in the work of Paul Nash, where objects remain too much themselves and are too aloof from one another. Indeed, there is so little jostling, so little

commerce between the various items in his landscape or still life that one notices Nash tending to place his objects at such intervals on the receding ground planes that they are each visible in their entirety; none overlapping another, no part of one being hidden behind a part of an object in front of it. This is only a tendency (some of the surrealist pictures of downland inhabited solely by white fungi are clear cases); but it is indicative of the character of his plastic thought: we feel him laying out the whole thing as one builds a model of a village, constructing it solidly in his mind and then finally looking at it from a certain chosen angle, rather high up, and then making what he saw fit into a pictorial design. More than any other painter of equal distinction Paul Nash strikes us as having failed to unite a number of processes in a single intuitive act.

13

FIVE TYPES OF ABSTRACTION

Ben Nicholson, Victor Pasmore, William Scott, Roger Hilton, John Wells

It is probably a misfortune that the word which has come, before all others, to be universally associated with non-figurative painting and sculpture should be the adjective *abstract*. This word, as a verb, means to withdraw or take away from an entity some element which previously adhered to it; or of which it was in part composed. It was thus correct to speak, for instance, of the Cubist works of Braque or Picasso as being 'abstract', since they resulted from the process of abstracting certain qualities from nature—that is, from the persons or objects which were the subject of their paintings. For instance, certain structural qualities inherent in, say, a wine-glass were abstracted from the real wine-glass and presented neat, undiluted, as it were, by other natural attributes of wine-glasses, such as their transparency or polish. (Cubist wine-glasses look as though they are made of wood.) This involved revolutionary changes of emphasis. Whereas in Cézanne a preoccupation with structural configuration, though powerfully present, was still subordinate to the illusionistic representation of natural appearances, in the Cubists a special notation for the intuitive apprehension of structure in solid objects gained precedence over the demands of representational figuration. Nevertheless, no one ever feels, before any work by either Picasso or Braque, that the representational function of painting has been discarded or superseded. On the contrary,

the subject (a harlequin, a satyr, a still life, a studio interior) is always there, quietly permeating the entire composition. Indeed, some would say that that composition only exists in order to commend the subject more powerfully to our minds and imaginations than it could, unaided, commend itself.

Properly speaking, then, 'abstract' painting is painting in which we must inevitably perceive a specific subject, a reality which is distinct from the painting; but which the painting *represents*. Picasso and Braque are (and always have been) abstract artists *in this sense only*. They are *figurative* artists; strictly speaking, they are representational artists. Indeed, it is precisely because the subject is still present in their works that the abstraction involved in their presentation is so forceful.

However, for the last forty years there has been in existence another school of painting (and sculpture) which has little connection with Cubism. It is mistakenly known as the school of 'pure abstraction'; that is, it is non-figurative. Its principal exponents had little contact with the School of Paris during their formative years. I am thinking of the Constructivists, and of the brothers Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner in particular; but also of Piet Mondrian, Ben Nicholson and Wassily Kandinsky. Although Kandinsky had no stylistic affinity with Mondrian, Gabo or Pevsner (and, similarly, Mondrian and Nicholson are related less to Gabo and Pevsner than to one another)—at least these five artists had one thing in common: each evolved a 'completely abstract' style, from which all trace of subject-matter was eliminated. The painting or construction (Gabo and Pevsner, though working in the solid, in terms of three dimensions, substituted this term *construction* for *sculpture*) contained no specific reference to—still less any representation of—any object external to the work itself. Complete freedom from the representational function had, therefore, been achieved, and this, as I have already pointed out, is a thing that could never under any circumstances be said of Cubism.

What is unfortunate, however, is that this completely non-figurative art should have come to be known as *abstract* art. Art which is absolutely non-representational is not *abstract* at all, since there remains no evidence of any subject-matter from which its forms might have been abstracted. Abstraction implies a specific, concrete point of departure. But completely non-figurative images are pure inventions. They do not contain any hint of real objects outside themselves; one cannot possibly guess at any specific concrete point of departure in the real world around one for the simple reason that there has not been

one: the artist has not had a 'subject'. The subject-matter of a non-figurative work is purely subjective, if indeed one can still speak of subject-matter in relation to it. It has itself become its own subject matter.

Roughly speaking, the two schools of thought I have here been defining are both represented in Britain to-day. In this essay, however, I am concerned principally with five of the non-figurative painters. And in Britain, it is important to remember, non-figurative painting gained a secure foothold well before the Second World War. Little more happened elsewhere: the French produced little non-figurative art of importance until after the Occupation. In France, at any rate until 1945, Cubism more or less kept out Constructivism and the non-figurative: the emergence of non-figurative idioms among the younger French painters of the present day would seem to represent an invasion of the citadel of 'Latin' art by the aesthetics of Northern Europe. The figurative masters—Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Léger, Gris—have been succeeded by non-figurative painters. But not one of these—it is difficult to believe—shows anything like the same creative genius possessed by the older painters just named. (A small number of non-figurative painters existed, it is true, in Paris between the wars: but on the whole they were neither French, nor much acclaimed in Paris.) In Britain non-figurative art has a consistent history, and certainly in one artist—Ben Nicholson—we possess a non-figurative painter of greater historical importance than any non-figurative French artist. As long ago as 1913 the first completely non-figurative works to be arrived at in Britain were being painted by Wyndham Lewis in London. But Lewis soon abandoned this mode in favour of a variant of Cubism which enabled him to return to the representation of a hard metallic world inhabited by robot-like figures. This was Vorticism—a movement founded by Wyndham Lewis which closely paralleled Italian Futurism. Both movements now appear to us as being stylistic derivatives of French Cubism.

BEN NICHOLSON

The firm establishment of a non-figurative tradition in Britain was, nevertheless, not the work of Wyndham Lewis but of Ben Nicholson, who had learnt much from Braque's Synthetic Cubism of the early 1920s, and even more from Mondrian, and who finally flowered (if that is the right word for such austere creations) into 'pure abstraction'

round about 1930. It is important to remember that Nicholson has alternated, since 1930, between two styles—his own personal varieties of figuration and an uncompromising non-figuration. His most distinctive contribution to non-figurative painting has consisted in the very sensitive treatment of surfaces broken up into purely geometrical sections. The interplay of pure squares, rectangles, circles, and those L-shapes which result when one rectangle partially overlaps another, are almost the sole formal ingredients of this art. (Triangular forms are very rare in his work.) Besides painting such compositions he has carved them out, constructing them in the form of shallow reliefs. Ben Nicholson's austere, delicate and sensitive art is essentially architectural in feeling. Plastic form is lacking in it certainly: indeed, it might almost be classed as an ideographic rather than a spatial idiom.

I think there is little doubt that Ben Nicholson's fame—and as far as I can discover he is the one living English painter with an international reputation: others of roughly his generation are perhaps known better than they are admired abroad; or else *not* known—was established chiefly by his work of the period 1930-46, the period of his non-figurative 'square-and-circle' paintings and white carved reliefs (these last are possibly his most important contribution to the art of our time: the best of them have a measured, unemotive beauty that succeeds in attaining to the monumental while remaining as light as air—or should I say 'as light as light?'—and is supremely architectural without being impersonal). Before going on to consider his more recent work, which is 'impure' from the standpoint of this non-figurative period since it blends figurative and non-figurative elements in a single amalgam, I will begin by discussing what seem to me to be some of the limitations of the non-figurative Nicholson.

Whatever may be one's personal evaluation of the theory of the champions of non-figurative art, from Herbert Read's occasional essays to the propaganda in print which from time to time issues direct from practitioners; or whatever may be one's opinion of the work of Ben Nicholson, it is clear that he has long since hollowed out his niche; that he will be significant to the future historian not only of English but of European painting. For one thing, the Constructivist movement, though small, coheres; its members subscribe to certain consistencies, to a distinct aesthetic—and that is in itself unusual enough to attract the attention of the historian of our chaotic age. But a more important factor is the quality of this aesthetic: and if we feel

that it is too consistent, and that as a 'style' it precludes expression of all but a few of the infinite variety of aesthetic and spiritual experiences which seek, and seek legitimately, expression through art, we are not denying its historicity so much as affirming our belief in a less exclusive approach; an approach less inhibited by mentally accepted canons of consistency and taste.

But in the art of Nicholson virtue and vice have here a common root. The 'consistency' and the 'taste' derive in the first place from certain phases of French Cubism when 'plastic consistency' was thought by everyone, except Picasso (who was found to break the rules which others made from the data his work supplied as fast as they were formulated), to offer everything that the artist is in search of: and, secondly, from Mondrian and the Constructivists. To have perpetuated in a succession of refinements the most theoretical moment in modern art, as Nicholson has done, implies at once the liveliness and intelligence necessary to appreciate that moment, and a certain lack which constrains one to play complicated arpeggios in a given key for so long. It is to Nicholson's credit that the key is such a good one; that such a standard of artistic intelligence has been maintained. And if his work has appeared to possess an objective quality of vitality, cleanness, of sanity and wit, that has been welcome, too, in the atmosphere of the last twenty-five years. No one was likely to receive infection from the germs of aesthetic putrefaction by association with the Constructivists. Those aspects of plastic and graphic expression to which they held stubbornly throughout a surrealist decade are indeed fundamental to the art of painting, for what was ever achieved without construction and clarity and certain elements of mathematical balance informing the whole?

No one can quarrel with Nicholson for what he has done: it is what he has not done that prompts the suggestion that not quite enough of the ingredients of fine painting are present. To elevate the qualities just mentioned to the position of dogma, to insist upon having them 'in the raw'—construction visible; clarity literal, having the pinpoint precision of a naval chart; and balance and geometry obvious—this is the exclusive theory with which we are acquainted. I repeat that these are qualities which must inform all good painting, which means simply that they are not the whole story, that there is something else in which they can be manifest; that they are parts of an infinitely richer process than we have hinted at by extracting them from the complex and naming them alone.

In art, forms crystallize in the consciousness only after a prolonged agitation at what we might call the level of life itself. And if one seeks these forms, the forms which life alone conceals, one will not be content to manipulate an existing currency of crystals, so to speak. Rather one sets one's face towards the incoherent, vast and vastly intricate anonymities of Nature; towards the faceless and baffling but rich-to-infinity fields of Nature herself—which exist, for the painter's purpose, in whatever surrounds his physical frame by day, by night, in the moors of Celtic Cornwall and by the sea-sucked rocks, or in the lemon lamplight upon a stained and flaking city wall; in the lichen-covered stones of Zennor, or across the glittering surfaces of a Euston ABC's glass tables. New crystallizations are latent everywhere.

If you had visited an exhibition of Ben Nicholson's paintings in, for instance, 1945, you would have been delighted by much and instructed by much. But in the chill atmosphere of literal grey-blueness, in the presence of a perfected technique, you might have sensed that the perfection had the air of a destination. For in those measured squares and circles, overlaid with a paint as smooth and innocent as ether, from which all hint of human furniture has been emptied, all echo of familiar long-loved forms removed—chairs or tables, eyes or roses, chimneys or the sea—we had the conclusion of a logic which I believe will be found to be at a tangent to the mainstream of art.

When Roger Fry, glowing with conviction, found in Cézanne's apple the contemplation of a solid object so profound that the first and obvious meaning of that object—its 'appleness': the fact that it was an apple—seemed quite insignificant, he laid an overwhelming emphasis on the formal aspect common to solid objects. He distinguished in everything a 'formal' and a 'literary' aspect. The formal aspect of the apple, the fact that it is a greenish mass with a rounding profile, became the apple's 'truest' aspect: the literary aspect, the fact that the round green mass was also an apple, seemed incidental, unimportant. And if we have come to regard this doctrine of 'significant form' as inadequate, and have come to realize that the quality of the apple's formal aspect is as much determined by its identity with the apple as by its identity with formal values in other objects, we are indebted in part to those artists who have striven to isolate the formal aspect and to present it distilled and pure, quite free of the abolished apple. It was a necessary operation, requiring intelligence and courage. Some of us, however, are inclined in one way or another, to return to the apple, because it still secretes more than it has ever given up.

Between 1945, when his exhibition at the Lefevre Gallery in London consisted, I think, entirely of non-figurative paintings, and 1948 Nicholson moved steadily away from the non-figurative. By 1947, although the larger canvases remained non-figurative, there were a great number of gay but tiny pictures of playing-cards or tram tickets hobnobbing with lighthouses, or of fancy fish-floats and toy Union Jacks threading themselves on the pencilled skyline of the cromleched field of a Cornish hill. So dramatic was the change that I even thought, then, that Ben Nicholson might ultimately abandon his severest abstractions to the extent of interesting himself in portraiture. I was only going on the furtive appearance of a number of jug-profiles among the severe rectangularities of his paintings of that year, 1947. Yet even then I did not realize how soon these witty, figurative works would oust the familiar 'square-and-circle' abstract paintings. But by 1949 all his new works were landscapes or still lifes.

At this point in his career, therefore, the majority of Ben Nicholson's latest paintings are of a new kind altogether. Many of them represent a partial return to the objects of still life: they seem to be a cross between the square-and-circle style, where the whole emphasis was upon the formal articulation, and the gay but slighter still-life assortments, in which the artist's reviving interest in the world of *things* was at last unchecked. The new style shows the melting of the rectangles: wine-glass forms are beginning now to obtrude their coy waistlines from behind the unbudging squares: soft shadows are infiltrating, and marvellous violets, greens, saffron yellows and wine-reds are breaking out everywhere. This 'infiltration' has continued to the present day.

Ben Nicholson is at once an artist of great distinction and originality and yet of peculiar weaknesses and limitations. One of the extraordinary things about him is that he remains an extremely English artist despite his emulation, at different times, of Cubism and Constructivism. He has what are, in a pictorial sense, typically English gifts: elegance, wit, a literal preciseness, i.e. he likes a sharp pencil; and, in colour, a pale radiance reminiscent of our finest landscape watercolourists—sometimes one of his delicate little landscapes in oil *is*, at first sight, a nineteenth-century watercolour drawing! And his failings are equally English. These include diluted colour which is often only decorative instead of spatial; an almost total lack of plastic strength or weight, together with the weak pulse that usually accompanies this—I mean that his rhythms are hesitant and tend to be superficial; they are

manipulated at the picture surface, instead of behind it. In consequence that surface has often only a brittle unity. Rhythm, one feels, should be a submerged force irresistibly unifying all the pictorial elements from behind, from underneath. But in a Nicholson there is no behind, no depth of recession. For him rhythm is something which skips gaily across the surface, like the 6B pencil line of which he is so fond, cutting across and over the waiting strips of exquisite pale colour (Plate 31).

Sometimes this pencil line—which, like much else in his pictorial repertoire, has been a constant feature of his art, more or less from the beginning—does all the work and can claim all the success. At other times it is his undoing. Like other English painters in whom rhythm is weak, being thought rather than felt, Nicholson resorts to tight unrhythmic detail both in the description of form and in design: this detail (the lines have sometimes some awkward 'points' in Nicholson 'junctions') an over-busy pencil supplies. On the other hand, his main successes of recent times have been arrived at by the use of predominantly linear means: these, too, his pencil has created. For instance, a number of pictures in his exhibition in 1952 consisted solely of rhythmic pencilled lines on a single delicately coloured—one might almost say a tinted—ground. Taking the profile of a mug or jug as a sort of stable archetype, and making it central to the design, he then weaves other lines across and around it which fully or partially echo the lines of the first silhouette. These were fascinating for the extraordinary degree of invention they displayed *within* a very tight convention. Here indeed was the beauty of *order*.

But it is always the flat profile of an object that Nicholson takes as his archetypal image, never a section, never a more complicated three-quarter view, for that would involve the presentation of solidity: a plastic image would have to be employed, and Nicholson does not command plastic (or sculptural) means. He was never a Cubist; not even before 1933, up to which point his main influence had been Braque. His presentation of the most orthodox Cubist personages—cut-glass tumblers, carafes, guitars, the Ace of Clubs and the Queen of Hearts—was always ideographic rather than plastic. In order to be Cubist (and, therefore, plastic) a work must convey a sense of weight and density, the weight and density of real objects. Nicholson is remote from this sense of reality: his mugs and jugs are airy ghosts of the real jugs and mugs of your kitchen, which are also those of Cubism. Nicholson has none of Braque's intense grip upon the poetic quality of the everyday. If Picasso and Braque portray a real object—and the

result is a Cubist mug—Nicholson portrays a Cubist mug—and the result is, therefore, at two removes from reality. Of course during the period of his famous white reliefs he was certainly quite untroubled by the complex problems besetting such a representational art as Cubism. Yet the Cubist criteria once again apply, for, since 1945, Nicholson has aimed increasingly at creating a curious and very personal fusion of a non-figurative, semi-geometric (but not, for that reason, in the least mechanical), architectural content with the chaste, realistic, pencilled profiles of the familiar Cubist mugs, jugs and glass jars. His mugs still have flat looping handles—an aspect of rotund form that would not commend itself so frequently if Nicholson *were* a Cubist, for it denies the sense of volume (profiles occur in Cubist painting in opposition to massive volumes: in Nicholson profiles simply supplement other profiles). Also, there is a further element which is most important in his post-1945 development: I mean the intrusion into still-life arrangements of sections filled with realistic landscape.

I believe Ben Nicholson likes to insist upon a connection between the landscape in which he lives (St. Ives, Cornwall) and his painting. The connection is there, and is a strong one; but it is oblique. I mean that it is in his more abstract still lifes, rather than in his overt, and wittily representational, landscapes, that the connection is manifest. When Nicholson attacks landscape direct, giving us a view of St. Ives harbour over the roofs and chimneys of the town, he is possibly too picturesque: he too often produces a toylike, spaceless, nursery model of landscape which has little if anything to do with the spatial sequences to be found out of doors. Such landscapes are post-cards pinned on the wall behind the Nicholson still-life group. On the other hand, the still-life paintings are impregnated with qualities of light, texture and colour which convey one at once to St. Ives. The over-clean 'washedness' of the cool colours and the smooth neat textures are qualities very precisely related to that rain-washed, Atlantic-blown town. And the multiplicity of pale greys, off-whites, pale blues, purples and yellows all have a valid basis in the white ocean-reflected light which almost bleaches things in its diffuse radiance.

VICTOR PASMORE

After Ben Nicholson the contemporary English painter who is most renowned for his uncompromisingly non-figurative style is Victor Pasmore. Unfortunately, one factor bearing on Pasmore's considerable

fame is a non-aesthetic one: the public are intrigued by the personal history of this artist, who, with apparently dramatic suddenness, renounced a highly popular idiom, of a post-Impressionist nature, for one of complete non-figuration. Or so it seemed to the average spectator. In fact, as I hope to show, Pasmore's transition in 1948 from a realist to a non-figurative mode of expression was gradual and even predictable, if one could have read the signs his earlier style contained. To demonstrate this I must begin with an account of that earlier style.

His subjects—before the transformation of 1948—were the subjects of a metropolitan Impressionist: girls before mirrors; 'everlasting' flowers, or roses, in a jug on a shelf or, again, in front of a mirror; interiors of sitting-rooms or kitchens; urban views over Hammersmith back-gardens to the Thames; and so on. We might say that in his works of that period although he derives most from Degas; Bonnard, Sickert and Chardin all had their echo at times. Even Whistler seems to have intervened at one point, with Pasmore paying much attention to the Thames. But a vision stretched broad by Degas (*fuzzy* would not have been an unjust epithet in 1940)—can manage even the intricacies of bare winter willows without tightening them into a different key. Pasmore's increased attention, in 1943 and 1944, to intricate and detailed forms was an attempt to get beyond a certain looseness in earlier works, when he was content to arrive at a rather easy, *even* equivalent for the visual scene, in which tone-colour was squarely, lightly and very tastefully brushed in; a subtle tonal scheme, basing itself on invisible drawing, with only here or there a semi-linear gesture to emphasize a contour. But the three-dimensional scene is always surely felt and stated, or implied; and Pasmore's rather square 'handwriting' the vertical-horizontal rhythm that is discernible in his application of the paint is particularly indicative of *space*, and somehow pushes back the bottle, the table, the man's face, the dresser or door that intrudes from left or right, until they all find their exact position in the illusory space behind the picture surface, and are inevitably 'placed'. This process involves, to be sure, the creation of 'arbitrary' planes; but they little resemble the systems of Cézanne (the occasional prevalence of a downward and a horizontal hatch-stroke provides only a superficial likeness) and the tendency of Pasmore's planes to lie parallel to the picture surface sometimes introduces a brittle feeling, and impedes a fuller definition of his forms. But then Cézanne's planes were created to describe the dynamic thrust and movement that his unique sensibility

found latent in the forms themselves. Pasmore's whole approach is different. One feels that, like Sickert, he is—throughout this Impressionist period—somewhat limited by a 'camera-vision': conscious *observation*, unconsciously tempered by a taste nurtured on the French Impressionists, is his mode. No violent imaginative impulse arises to distort the *observed appearance* of his subject; and so his 'camera-eye' continues to record things with squared-up positional correctness, and it is only *on top* of such a structure that his plastic imagination may blend colours, match tones and weave the textures that are his alone. In a word, he lacks, possibly, a degree of empathy. This is why he is so much nearer, in all these works, to Degas than to Renoir or Cézanne; Renoir, whose passionate identification of himself with his subject gave him such certainty of feeling that he could dismiss Observation from her premier place and bend her to his purpose; Cézanne, whose forms have a thrust, a distortion, an emphasis and a *meaning* which observation alone could never have yielded.

Every painter worth consideration displays a new combination of observable, objective facts and imagined, subjective ones. Where an artist's central meaning or emphasis is predominantly inner or predominantly outer, the tension—which is the art—is relaxed and we have either the unruly growth of an undisciplined, luxuriant imagery (the too-easy triumph of inner fantasy); or the dry, uninterestingly accomplished rendering of the obvious (the subjection of imagination to observation, or to the mere mechanics of technique).

Victor Pasmore has sometimes been in danger of the latter, as Sutherland has of the former. What has been easy for Pasmore is the achievement of an excellently broad but sometimes merely tasteful equivalent for the visual scene.

Nevertheless, the representational pictures of this period have a mysterious vitality. With a very sharp eye for tone, he could always evoke a glass of water or a willow tree, and place them securely in a spatial context, with the minimum of brushwork and actual paint. Solidity always comes floatingly (yet none the less surely), as in Turner. Unlike Turner, though, solidity in Pasmore's Impressionist pictures is a matter of rectilinear shadowy wafers of definitive tone-colour, superimposed, but with plenty of air between. His objects are reduced to silhouettes of colour and usually these silhouettes remain rather Japanese and detached from one another: their function is as often decorative as plastic—a fact which their derivation from reality (by means of that almost too photographic eye, it must be said) does

not alter. In the large landscapes with which he winds up this whole chapter in his art he gets the conviction of unity, of an allover impact, by setting isolated, intricate, photographic yet stylish silhouettes in a realistic paste, matched to the atmospheric appearance of river, mist and sky. But one is aware of these separate processes *as* separate processes. One is also aware of the painter's extreme detachment; of his very conscious manipulation of a multitude of snapshots—photographically accurate units and fragments of visual information being shuffled and organized into a composition. Again, one notices that the character of these vertical screens of colour, which always lie parallel to the picture's surface whether they evoke a face or a factory chimney, is determined just as much by the rhythms inherent in Pasmore's hand —that squarish scribble which, as I said, constitutes Pasmore's very suggestive 'brushwriting'—as by the form of the things thus described, which is as it should be. Tentative triangular patches of tone (more tone than colour sometimes) made their appearance in these large final landscapes. These were not so much a sign or symbol for *child* as an ill-developed photograph of a three-year-old in a summer frock. Yet at first sight there seemed a Klee-like development in *Children Playing on the Banks of a River*, exhibited in 1947.

My own reaction to Pasmore's final, very realistic landscapes was, I find, not all that it might have been. I wrote, in 1947:

> 'That Pasmore should fight the bleared snapshots in himself is good: yet I cannot feel his amateur Seurat dots are a success: or the brittle crazy-paving shapes he is now trying to see in the mist. His genius is less modern than this: he alone can emulate the broad, unangular vision of Degas.'

Little did I realize to what use Pasmore was about to put his 'amateur Seurat dots' and 'brittle, crazy-paving shapes'; i.e. two elements of a non-figurative nature which had thus made their first appearance in the context of almost Whistlerian pictures of the Thames. Indeed, these abstractions also numbered a sort of yellow and pink chessboard which appears, mirage-like, out among the sunset reflections in mid-stream in one painting of the Thames at Hammersmith of this period. At least I had recognized that this abstract element was suddenly *there*; even if I deplored it. When it came, the famous change was one from canvases on which flat and, on the whole, rectilinear wafers of subdued but luminous tone-colour were evocative of an intensely atmospheric form

of direct spatial illusion, to canvases whereon a roughly geometric configuration of rectilinear and semicircular wafers are shuffled—but shuffled *as wafers*. Thus, in canvases painted up to 1948, the pictorial organization of thin patches of tone-colour, on the surface of the picture, was always immediately destructive of that surface since it created at once a direct illusion—the spatial illusion of actuality. The patches of colour were shuttled across and behind one another to give us the sensation of recession as it comes to us from an external setting—figtree, fence, fog, river, fog, feathery hulk of willow, fog, failing sun or presiding star. After 1948, though the wafers evoked forms in space, the forms in turn evoked no subject-matter—only a system of objects stripped of their worldly identity.

To create these anonymous objects Pasmore resorted to montage and even used newspaper as a means of differentiating one area from the next. For this reason most critics mistook what he had done for a pastiche of the *papier collé* works which Braque, Gris and Picasso made around the year 1913. We may admit that there were resemblances in texture and even design. But these were superficial. The basic rhythms of the Pasmore abstractions were utterly different from those of the famous Cubists; also, the Pasmores (of 1948 and 1949) gave no witty commentary upon a particular still-life reality of match-boxes, cigarette-packets, wine-bottles and Parisian dailies, but were solely concerned to communicate light: a white-grey light (or, in some, a roseate, almost brownish illumination) was made to reverberate through a spatial setting monumentally orchestrated.

The new non-figurative paintings were exhibited for the first time in 1949 at the Redfern Gallery. This is what I wrote about them at the time:

> 'Immediately upon entering the room at the Redfern one gets the vital communication: air, light, space. And the space is the light, and the light is space. Unidentifiably, solidity is there, offering a firm resistance at the back of the white space—for whiteness is the essence of this light. But the solidity is never particularized into this or that recognizable, familiar object. No more than a series of blind facets of form, geometric in tendency, are revealed, one behind another, interrelated in depth. If you focus your mind on their surface only, you will find these paintings devoid of all but a patchwork decorativeness and the phrases I have just written a lot of wordy nonsense. Their relation at the surface is the most easily

grasped because the most elementary of these patches' varied functions: but in this respect precisely they prove an instructive contrast to the rectilinear abstraction of Ben Nicholson [who, in 1948, was our only other abstract painter of any genius]. Nicholson's rectangular patches edge up to one another with the unyielding firmness of juxtaposed slabs of inlaid marble: each piece is primarily *itself* and not a communicative device, communicating something other than itself—a form in space, for instance. Nicholson's most abstract works must each be regarded as an entirely independent, free entity: an object existing in its own right, drawing attention to nothing outside itself. Pasmore's new paintings are in quite a different tradition: so far from existing in their own right, they exist primarily to register something outside themselves. Every one of them creates space and the illusion of forms in space—just as the forms in a Cézanne do: the difference is that in Pasmore the peculiarity, the identity of the forms is withheld. With him we contemplate the relationship of anonymous solids arranged in space. Pasmore's squarish patches relate to a system of forms in space: Nicholson's patches relate to themselves alone, there on the picture surface; his surface is only surface.

'Pasmore has no *particular* subject in mind, one assumes. He is more figurative than Ben Nicholson (always, in this argument, considered at his most abstract), because he evokes light, air and space, which are not in themselves natural attributes of the surface of canvas or board. On the other hand, Pasmore is less figurative than Braque or Picasso, in whose pasted paper pictures the specific object loomed through the organization of the surface, clear and poetically potent.

'Not until one has ceased to view these abstract paintings by Pasmore in terms either of Braque, or the Constructivists (Nicholson or Mondrian), can one absorb their real quality, which is the quality of Pasmore, in whatever phase of his development. The exquisite colour, clear in hue, resonant in tone, and softly flat in its actual application: the intricate, thoughtful balance of design which, while it derives from a profound sensation of space, is wonderfully flattering to the surface: and finally the extremely sensitive touch, whether of chalk or brush—by means of all these the Pasmore of the present is seen to be perfectly related to the Pasmore of the past. The abstract Pasmore is the inevitable extension of the Pasmore of roses, striped blouses and oval mirrors.'

What I did not say then was that in those collages Pasmore the colourist was suffering himself to be eclipsed, for the time being, by Pasmore the architect. At that 1949 exhibition architectural exploration had priority: colour was there, but colour was whiteness of light. It was not until the following year, 1950, that he returned to the medium for which he has some genius—the medium of oil-paint on canvas. In 1949 colour is whiteness of light. But in 1950 the prism expands and flowers again into its components and we are assailed by a variety and intensity of pure hues which makes the pigment of his earlier, impressionist pictures look muted. We are also the gratified spectators of the return of all the personal qualities of *touch* (the way he puts paint on canvas) for which Pasmore was justly famed in his Euston Road days.

What made this double recovery of personal qualities, in colour and touch, possible at this stage? It was, surely, Pasmore's rapid evolution, during 1949 and 1950, of abstract forms and symbols that were of his own creation. I am referring to his 'Spiral Motif', principally; though there are others, such as the solid disc enclosed by a square of different colour (it is rather like an anemone); or the squarified lozenge enclosed by a thick line which is sun or moon in that non-figurative masterpiece; *Spiral Motif: Green, Violet, Blue and Gold: The Coast of the Inland Sea.* Still finer, though, is *The Snowstorm* (Plate 28). The spirals are a great invention since they create and define space without committing the painter to any subject-matter whatsoever: they contain no echoes of this or that subject in the world of appearances; but they *are* demonstrations of an elemental force-pattern in the physical universe, and we have to go back to Leonardo's illustrations of the whirlwind and whirlpool to find an equivalent image in pictorial art. The degree of discovery is great indeed in Pasmore's pictures of this kind.

WILLIAM SCOTT

The third English painter with whom I must deal here, William Scott, is a little younger than Pasmore and nearly twenty years younger than Ben Nicholson. If Nicholson is the greatest English exponent of that international movement which embraces Mondrian and Gabo, Arp and Magnelli, Hélion and Delaunay, can we align Pasmore with a Continental group? And Scott? Pasmore is difficult; much of the *quality* (texture, colour, etc.) of Cubist collage persists in him; but his rhythm and his content are quite at variance with Cubism, as I have said. Possibly he is nearer a contemporary Parisian painter like Serge

Poliakoff than anyone. Scott, on the other hand, falls easily into line so far as his general feeling and the *matière* of his canvases are concerned. In this sense de Staël and Soulages, among non-figurative French painters, and Buffet, among expressionist, are comparable with Scott. His images, however, are his own.

I believe Clive Bell used to say that William Scott was the only young English painter who, having encountered Picasso, had managed to absorb the impact and been able thoroughly to digest what he had taken from that master. This was a tribute well deserved, for Scott has always been remarkable, here in England, for his possession of the pictorial science that enables a painter to construct a picture which, like an efficient machine, does actually *work*, in a purely pictorial sense—a faculty still commoner in Paris than London. Yet this compliment of a few years back rings strangely now in one respect: we no longer think immediately of Picasso when looking at Scott's pictures (if, in fact, we often did? Cézanne and Bonnard were equal as influences on the earlier Scott.) Scott is, and long has been, a very individual painter with a remarkably clear-cut and—especially latterly—powerful personality. His tall, black, spiky wine-bottles: his lean black fishes: his elongated spoons or toasting-forks that had the startling presence of small pieces of Negro sculpture: and, above all, the superbly plastic emptiness of his background kitchen walls—all these were his own, impregnated by his own personal quality, possibly ten years ago.

In the remarkable exhibition which he held in 1953 at the Hanover Gallery, William Scott was discovered to have abandoned the fish, the eggs, the fish-slice and the colander: yet their absence only demonstrated that what always counted most was not the quality of his still-life objects but the quality of his pictures themselves. Here is an artist for whom literary associations count for little. The concrete reality of plastic colour and form is paramount. Extremely gifted, Scott's gifts are those of the mere painter. That is, his whole passion, his whole energy, is directed into the organization of the picture. For such an un-English phenomenon (the painter, pure and simple) life itself and all its mystery, all the tensions of consciousness, both intellectual and sensual, are focused in the mere arrangement of form against form, of tonal colour against tonal colour. And, of course, this powerful and original painter has a strength and directness—that of pure intuition—which quite precludes the soft picturesqueness and prettiness which so much English painting—even of an 'abstract' order—cannot escape, it seems.

It is typical of Scott to combine great austerity of design with voluptuous paint, rich in texture and colour and very subtle in tone. In 1953 Scott painted a picture called *Harbour*. It consists solely of a rough white ground on which a thin, solid black tongue-form (a harbour jetty) curves out and upwards from a point on the left-hand edge of the canvas a few inches up from the bottom left-hand corner, out into the middle of the whiteness; while, across the top, runs a thinner, black, uneven 'horizon' line parallel to but some inches lower than the top edge of the picture. There is also a small square of black in the 'sky' in the extreme top left of the canvas. The image of the jetty-tongue has extraordinary vitality and an almost alarmingly stark simplicity. Yet the thick, knifed, white pigment everywhere has, in conjunction with the black, a positive voluptuousness: and the whole design has a formal strength and compactness that is final—in the sense it gives of completeness. We are alarmed by the animal vigour of the image: yet soothed and reassured by the completeness of the formal statement.

In his later still lifes, of which there are many, the 'empty' areas of dirty white, or grey—brushed and scraped into a stringent vibrancy, which is the vibration of tone colour—these seem to have expanded in the painter's consciousness until they have nearly ousted the neat little kitchen-table personages. Some would say, therefore, that Scott has abandoned figuration. This is surely to mistake the meaning of his most recent phase. Scott could not be further from the purists of non-figurative art. A table haunts all his geometry. The restless pulse of living things everywhere inhabits his forms, pulling them out of the square, out of the straight. Even in those of his later canvases in which the familiar, thrusting framework of thin, spindly horizontals checking thin, wobbly verticals—like a Mondrian that is melting—is only the ghost of a table, we have the feeling that something *animal* lurks beneath the beautifully ragged, lopsided, flapping rectangular slabs of ochre, scarlet, crimson, grey or black. And Scott always used a table for two purposes: as a *personage*, a mysteriously animated quadruped: and as a most apt vehicle for architectural design.

The architecture of all his pictures since 1952 (when he finally ejected the fish and the frying-pan) is stronger, its rhythms are both simpler and possessed of a stronger pulse, than ever before. No painter in this country moves across his canvas with a surer tread. None combines a firmer punch with a greater elegance of control: the rugged, barn-door (or fishing-boat hull) quality of paint is the means for

conveying a supremely formal utterance. And space is always generated —both by the actual disposition of the forms and directly; directly *out of* the vibrant flatness of the paint. The resonance of a flat, knifed area of tomato red (perhaps with a yellower orange ground lighting it up from underneath) itself develops that spatial sensation of depth which is so difficult to achieve, and yet is so vital a component in Scott's idiom. It is this sensation of space and depth in a painted flatness that inspires much contemporary painting. Scott is a brilliant exponent of it. One might indeed claim that many of the so-called non-figurative painters of the present day have discovered not non-figuration but the figuration of space. Space itself is so often their real subject. Thus their 'objects', though solid, are anonymous.

Yet Scott is not usually non-figurative, even in this sense. The personality that spurted from those winking, perfect eggs, those silhouetted fish and frying-pans of his earlier period is still present. And many of his older images are there still: the black window-panes, the ochre table and the orange walls of *Interior* (1953) are only forced one degree nearer the surface of the picture; they are not abolished. *Table Still Life* (1952) (Plate 36) even retains pans and pots: only, their modelled curves have been subtracted, rendering them squarish and immensely dense and weighty. As verisimilitude recedes yet again, such images increase in potency. Admittedly one adjusts oneself to the reading of them. Yet that done, their 'reality' is undeniable. Painting with his whole body, not merely with his head, William Scott persuades us that nothing is more *real* than these bare yet sensuous pictures which many will dismiss, even now, as 'too abstract'. He is one of our small handful of really significant painters.

ROGER HILTON

Roger Hilton[1] is a natural painter. That is to say, he cannot put brush to canvas without creating a splotch, smear, streak, stain or smudge (in other words, 'a brushstroke') that is charged with expressive quality. And when I say expressive, I do not mean expressionist. Hilton is the opposite of that: he is a contemplative among painters. For him the calm virtues of the craft are the main point of departure: deliberate design; fine, rich and exceptionally varied colour; and a paint texture that shows an equal variety and inventiveness—these are not merely his means: they are also his inspiration. Indeed, Hilton

[1] English: born 1911.

begins and ends with paint. His whole system of pictorial thought and emotion is centred in his brushstrokes themselves. The precise character, the texture, size, colour, tone, direction and rhythm of each ragged touch is his main conscious preoccupation. And this is why he is abstract. The *quality* of his paint surface fills his conscious mind and, thus obtruding, prevents him seeing round or beyond it to the need for a subject. Nevertheless, what we call 'the subject' is something eternally present in visual art. It is an element that no conscious effort on the abstract artist's part can succeed in eliminating. I say this because the mind insists, it seems, on finding an equivalent for that reality *beyond* the paint which once was a nude on a bed, or two trees and a haystack. Our minds insist on reading a double meaning into every graphic mark made on paper or canvas. So, into Hilton's systems composed of fat splotches of orange, black or scarlet, or of thin nervous streaks of dull khaki, mushroom, pale viridian or lemon yellow, we involuntarily read a three-dimensional meaning: we find 'a subject'. That subject may be said to consist simply of a variety of forms in space; most are unidentifiable; but some suggest a flower or a face. Occasionally, it is true, their delineation is hesitant, their construction tentative, or lacking in exact balance. But for the most part the artist's intention is firm; and his means are adjusted to that intention.

In 1953 Roger Hilton changed his style, abandoning the broken surface with its fuzzy, impressionist vibration of brushed smudges, some stringy and tenuous, others fat and rotund, soft blots of colour. Suddenly he decided to pursue a line of discovery—initiated perhaps by Serge Poliakoff—that was already being explored by his friend Stephen Gilbert (who is that rare thing, an English member of the Ecole de Paris); and by Constant, a Dutch painter working much in Paris. Briefly speaking, this involved dividing the canvas up into a few flat areas of thickly applied pigment in primary colours. Like all post-war non-figurative painting of quality, the literal geometry and tidiness and straightness of line is eschewed entirely. The divisions are few—possibly there will only be two 'islands' of flat colour (two flat and ragged forms with eaten-away edges, nervously drawn) situated—in a relationship of static tension—on a white ground; with the addition perhaps of a single ragged, heavily drawn line somewhere (see Plate 30 for an example of Hilton's work of this kind). The brush has been exchanged for the knife as the most appropriate instrument for cementing these asymmetric, flapping form-silhouettes, executed in thick paint, on to the surface of the canvas. Hilton's *conscious intention*

has been to eliminate all charm, all painterliness, even that evidence of mastery of the material which is itself a seductive element in painting. It has been, indeed, to strip his pictorial statement of any and every beguilement; leaving us alone, face to face, with the bare bones of a fundamental visual experience which is, in my view, profound, relevant and noble. What this experience amounts to I will try very briefly to explain. But first let me say that all this ascetic intent on Hilton's part is fortunately always unavailing: no matter how ragged the drawn shape, or perversely lopsided the balance of forms, or unexpected the empty flatnesses, or 'messy' the trowelled application of pigment, or harsh and uncompromising the choice of colours (cadmium red, cadmium yellow, ultramarine blue, white and black—all undiluted—are his most typical choice: though chocolate browns or grey sometimes unite, in an unexpected harmony, the more disparate primaries, simply by their additional presence)—Hilton's canvases have always that well-made, professional, completed look which comes only with long experience and full understanding of the art of picture making. Hilton's many years in Paris are probably responsible for his mastery of the great elusive elementary rules of good painting: the equation between *colour* and *tone* is resolved: colour is handled at its purest intensities without loss of tonal communication: equilibrium of forms is achieved: evenness of emphasis throughout the picture-surface is achieved: all forms, all shapes between 'forms', are equally positive, meaningful, significant (*pictorially*, that is: on their symbolic meaning —and this must exist—I do not propose to speculate here).

There is no doubt that the main conscious preoccupation of such a painter is with questions of *space*. The traditional rôle of space in painting has been to provide the element of illusion. An illusory space *behind* the canvas is created by all the variants on perspective that various schools have evolved. Even Cubist or Fauve pictures evoke a spatial scheme, or setting, that exists beyond—somewhere at the back of—the picture itself. Thus the picture frame was always a window-frame. It is only with the advent of non-figurative painting, such as Hilton's, that this space-creating function undergoes a radical change. Hilton's 'flat' colour-patches *advance*, bodily, physically, it seems, from the canvas towards one, and out into the room. Space in such works is not an illusory area *behind* the picture: it is an actual event, the physical operation of the picture in the room. We all know that a different sense of space is achieved in a room where the different walls have been painted different colours. In just the same way Hilton may

be said to be manipulating the actual space in a room in which one of his paintings is hanging. Such painting is thus supremely architectural: in fact, it *is* architecture. Yet the true artist is a more mysterious creature than the interior decorator or designer. Roger Hilton may assist the architect in expanding a small wall, or making a large one contract. But his blunted, round-cornered, moth-eaten shapes have a drama about them: an immanent spirit, at odds with the immaculate formal concept, somehow disturbs the spectator. Despite all their training, Hilton's forms break ranks and wave a scraggy arm at one wildly; or let their heavy square heads hang down, like lifeless scarecrows. The purist sees only the form: or sees only form *in* the forms. Yet where there is vitality in an abstract form there is inevitably a certain ambivalence. Good forms possess *personality*. And personality is felt to be the very antithesis of the abstract. But surely the experience of discovering that mere familiarity with an object or place can strip it of its impersonality is a common one? We inject personality into everything we touch. Milk-cans, candlesticks, oil-lamps: these possess too much personality for us to-day—they reek of a near-past we are loath to outgrow. Old motor-cars have, so it *appears*, more personality than new ones. The new is, apparently, always devoid of personality: which only means that it possesses a personality we are as yet unfamiliar with. Can it be that the function of non-figurative painting is to put us on familiar terms, emotionally, with the vast abstract physical forces our scientific age is eliciting from what we once, much more cosily, used to know as Mother Nature? Is a painter like Roger Hilton giving a face to what has hitherto been faceless? Has he, as it were, painted the portrait of an electron?

JOHN WELLS

Three of the painters with whom I am concerned in this section have arrived at their present position by moving slowly but consistently away from figuration. Another—Ben Nicholson—having made the same journey much earlier, in the late 'twenties and early 'thirties, was ready, in the 'forties and 'fifties, to journey part of the way back again, to the extent of evolving a style which is to-day an amalgam of figurative and non-figurative elements balanced in a formal unity that reflects one of the subtlest personalities in contemporary European art. The figurative images in Nicholson are of Cubist origin. But the non-figurative, rectilinear configurations with which jug or mug have to lie

down in late Nicholson are Constructivist in descent and in quality. He may be said, therefore, to be a Cubist-Constructivist—perhaps he is the only one. Only a strong and vital personality, and one, within his limitations, possessed of great resourcefulness, could bring off, within the terms of a personal style, the unification of such formidable opposites.

I have mentioned this because John Wells, fifteen years Nicholson's junior and considerably in his debt at one period, has equally demonstrated that a 'return journey' can be undertaken without vitiating integrity or diluting personal style. To state it simply, Wells has, in five or six years, moved from the realm of geometric abstraction to that of landscape—and figures in landscape. Before and during the Second World War (when he was a doctor with a general practice in the Scilly Isles: he gave this up to devote himself to painting in 1945) Wells worked within the strictest, most austere international traditions of the non-figurative art of the period. And by international standards his work at this time had a distinction, indeed a perfection, which few British artists approached. Constructivist art had never more than a tiny handful of British exponents: Wells was amongst the élite. His models, for instance, consisting of board or even cardboard relief, supplemented by paper *collage*, with a wire or string superstructure creating a transparent, additional plane in front of the solid planes, showed a certain sympathy with the constructions of Naum Gabo, the sculpture of Barbara Hepworth, the reliefs of Arp and the painting of Nicholson, Klee and Miró. They also showed a degree of sheer taste so exquisite and so personal as to obliterate any suggestion of undue derivativeness—an accusation which the list I have just given might otherwise imply. And I should like here, in passing, to point to a particularly infuriating British prejudice: we always cavil where taste—good taste—is due for praise. The American male, one is told, perpetually 'acts tough' through an irrational dread of being thought 'sissy'. The British dread being caught in the contemplation of the purely aesthetic. Our very considerable native sensibility is only unchained, uncensored and allowed uninhibited expression in an oblique action, e.g. we have only preserved the Oxford or Cambridge college buildings and gardens as miracles of aesthetic quality because we have been under the impression, all along, that what we were doing there was something called 'preserving tradition'. The self-consciousness which springs up, suffocating all thought, when the British are cornered by 'a purely artistic consideration' is absent: the aesthetic faculty, the

formal sense, the creative ability to manipulate proportions, textures and abstract rhythms as significantly manifested in stone, brick, strips of grass lawn or cobble—all these native abilities and instincts have to work underground, in England, while the conscious mind talks away about tradition, Georgian discretion, Tudor tact or Gothic strength. We are hopelessly addicted to metaphor when discussing (or avoiding the discussion of) questions of visual art. We cannot, without actual embarrassment, talk directly about the fundamental formal abstract forms upon which all painting, architecture or sculpture are based and from which they mainly draw their vitality and individuality. The French or Italians practise the visual arts in the full daylight of uninhibited consciousness: we English practise them in our sleep.

So it is without any sense of apology that I acclaim the supreme taste with which John Wells's work is instinct as a major gift. No fine painter (and no great master) but has possessed and *used* an abundance of exquisite taste. It is simply an indispensable part of his equipment. In the case of Wells, the sense of refinement—not only of image and design but of the actual means of painting—is so heightened as to make us conscious of communication raised to the level of a passionate intensity. And I mean 'passionate intensity': not 'intense passion', which suggests the expressionist's excesses. But Wells forces passionate feeling through the rectifying sieve of a formal discipline; as, indeed, did Cézanne. First, he refines his surface, painting it white or grey or possibly rose, then partially scraping it away and painting it again, until it has the resistant, granular, exquisite hardness of stone: next he refines his forms, until they gain a sharpness of precision that cuts into the mind itself: finally he refines the pale, softly radiant colours, with their aura of white light, until they quiver like the unfocusable violet shadows of dusk. His passion is a passion for perfection; for the precise image sharpened into its barest, most economical, essential form. It is a passion which spares the artist not at all: the anguish of the search is directly translated into quality—into the rare beauty of the eventual abstract form. The intensity is a sharpness of vision, a purity of emotion, an uncompromising insistence upon finding the one elusive yet finally inescapable design—a design which shall unburden him, temporarily, of the intolerable strain which mere sensate existence imposes upon the artist.

In the painting of John Wells, as in that of Klee, the simplest geometric figures take on an emotion, become the vehicles of an excitement that is poetic as well as visual. A disc, a ring or drawn circle, a radial

form like a small cartwheel minus its rim or tyre, a triangle, or five parallel straight lines like the stave in a musical score: these become vested with a lyrical, magic significance which is removed, on one hand, from esoteric symbolism and, on the other, from any purely formal meaning. They are the innocent flowers of geometry. Geometrically they are pure: but they carry a mysterious overtone of evocation. In the painting which I reproduce, *City Dawn*, 1947 (Plate 27) Wells is already moving rapidly away from his non-figurative, Constructivist beginnings. Here triangles are already spires; vertical rectangles have become towers; a pale green disc (yes, green) is now the sun or moon; and a horizon has been established. But the creative process has been the very opposite of the Cubist, of course: this geometry was never abstracted from a visual scene: on the contrary, a symbol for a visual reality (the city dawn) has emerged out of the geometry.

This movement towards what I might call 'symbolic landscape' continued, and between 1951 and the time of writing (1954) Wells has gradually exchanged the hard, precisely defined forms based on geometry for a softer, flowing, more strictly plastic language. Since 1951 his painting has developed a more overt relationship to the Cornish hill-lines, rock-contours, water-currents he has so long meditated upon. The lines traced by a gull swooping round and round inside the great cup of a cove are registered in linear terms perhaps—as though the bird spun out string in the air as a spider emits the gossamer thread. But the cliff-forms are now carved out plastically, behind the line symbolizing the gull's movements. Tense in their rhythmic drawing, the forms in Wells's landscapes of this kind combine, it seems to me, the elegant force of the earlier geometric works with a new sensuousness. Also a new complexity of rhythm—since the rounded, flowing planes of his hill- or rock-forms *contain*, just below the surface it seems, a fierce conflict of severe geometric shapes. Indeed one feels that, in say a typical landscape of 1954, the formal complexity of interwoven, suggested or half-suggested planes is approaching a Cézannesque richness—without remotely *resembling* Cézanne, of course. And a new development is the intrusion of the human form, either as complete figures or simply a single head. These co-exist with the rock-forms: that is, they are images with two distinct 'readings'. They emerge logically as semi-abstract forms dovetailed into the landscape's shapes: then, suddenly, their identity as figures or faces flashes upon one, and one sees for a while the emergent human being, rock-created. But,

again unexpectedly, the figure again becomes shadowy and melts once again into the vertical rhythm of the rock.

John Wells's merits as a painter beget his faults. The 'rectifying sieve' I have mentioned sometimes censors or prohibits the flow of feeling too drastically. Where a painter like Peter Lanyon could do with a greater measure of strictness, Wells sometimes stands in need of a loosening-up. Continuing vitality sometimes decrees the sacrifice of some perfection, some aspect of purity or fineness. At all costs the sap must continue to flow. I think Wells's recent expansion into explicit landscape all to the good. If his art thus becomes descriptive where it was symbolic, his main interests continue. He invariably creates the same illusion of great aerial space, infinite skies, a far horizon. Formerly this space was inhabited by triangles and discs: now the silhouettes of West Penwith float in its depths. Into this poetry of space—a marine space, as often as not—John Wells is now able to inscribe many images. Whether 'abstract' or more naturalistic, they all relate to the reality he has so deeply experienced.

14

SCULPTURE: FRUIT OR THORN?

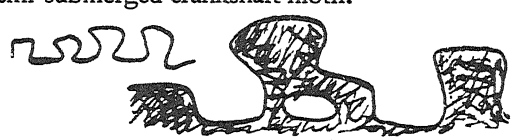
Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Alexander Calder, Reg Butler, Henri Matisse

HENRY MOORE

THERE is no doubt that Henry Moore is the most powerful artist to have appeared in this country since Turner and Constable. Indeed, there are very many who would already acknowledge him as the most significant of living sculptors in either Europe or America. Moore's work combines within itself more aspects of the sculptor's art than Brancusi's, as well as being the most potent sculptural expression of a poetry which, belonging to a later generation than Brancusi's, has had its pictorial expression in the works of Braque and Picasso. But to deal with the formal problems first—Moore has equalled the three-dimensional fullness of Brancusi's expression and taken it a stage further. Without having emptied his forms of all but a purely formal meaning—Brancusi suppressed with almost scientific thoroughness all non-formal meaning in his realization of a three-dimensional reality—Moore ventures beyond the perfection of one or two forms in relation. He has regained formal complexity: his Reclining Figure motif invariably contains numerous and complex movements and combinations of form under the skin of the carving, as it were. Whereas Brancusi perfected forms of a single movement, or of two or three simple movements in relation—Moore's figures thrust in every direction at once. In terms of his own kind of abstraction, Moore has regained the level of complexity and richness which Rodin maintained, in a very different

idiom, but which Maillol sometimes failed to reach. Maillol's formal simplicity is not always masterly: it sometimes denotes, not the complete digestion of the subtle complexity of Nature, but a failure to reach so far; an arbitrary stopping short at a stage where he could still control his material and maintain a unified result.

Moore's form derives its main character from Mexican and other primitive sculpture: but it also has affinities with French Cubist painting; and I believe he himself names certain Italian influences as well. The flat planes of Cubism show in his early carvings, some of which were purely abstract, as well as in some of his most recent—the four panels, of 1953, on the Time and Life Building: but on the whole his career shows a movement in the opposite direction from that of Analytical Cubism (a development I hope to describe more fully further on), for while Moore has moved, in a broad sense, from geometric to organic rhythms, the early Cubists increasingly obscured the human figure behind a screen of orchestrated abstract planes, geometric in quality. What has been constant in Moore has been a massive, semi-submerged crankshaft motif:



This comes from Mexico and it has given his works their typical square-round quality: it has also helped to suggest the analogy of fossil forms, as well as giving a likeness to that natural sculpture which results on the seashore. Water and air hollow out rock in one place and leave it elsewhere protruding in bosses and ledges: Moore's figures relate the human form to the natural formations of wood and stone and to larger formations such as a range of hills.

But while we feel we can know the quality of his form and the peculiarities of his structure, the poetic and symbolic reality of his works—which is most disturbing to some—is much harder to define. Those who put their trust in the language of psychology can doubtless find much in Moore which lends itself to their theorizing. However, to remark that Moore's forms are suggestive of embryos and that therefore the 'significance' of his sculpture is that it marks a desire to retreat from a full consciousness of modern life, with its typical predicaments and its unique anxieties, does not seem to me to get us anywhere. I doubt if it is possible to assess the true spiritual content of a great contemporary artist's work: I am not tempted to try. I am content to

aim, myself, at an accurate *description* of the *appearance* of contemporary works, rather than hazard their 'interpretation'. Also, there is always the collecting of relevant information to keep one occupied. For instance, I have noticed that in parts of Moore's native Yorkshire (Swaledale, in particular) the villagers decorate the eaves of their grey stone cottages and the tops of their garden walls and stone gateposts with large stones taken from the beds of streams and rivers. These natural 'carvings' have been hollowed out by the rushing water until they very closely resemble Moore's sculpture; they are often complete with holes worn through in a number of directions. Apart from this I cannot think of a single English influence in the work of our most powerful living artist—and this may not have been a conscious one—unless we go back as far as mediaeval carvings, which certainly seem now and then to contain rhythmic dispositions of line and mass which one would loosely call 'typical Moore'.

The exhilarating truth would seem to be that Moore has reversed the usual British rôle of acting as a reflector, or deflector of beams from Europe: Moore himself is a luminary, a source of light. To change the metaphor, we might say that British artists tend to acquire the formal vocabularies of Continental painters for describing subjects of their own: this description produces fresh nuances of meaning and new phrases that are in themselves most distinctive and valuable. But the underlying grammar and syntax (the underlying formal structure, that is) remain as they were; Continental in origin. Now Moore has supplied a grammar of his own. He has reacted more dynamically than most in the face of art and of Nature—more dynamically and profoundly than any other British artist for generations. Thus he has managed to *create*, in the most radical sense. He has created new forms. It is an equivalent, precisely, to what Picasso has done in painting. It is not surprising that these new forms of Moore's should have made such a profound impression in Europe and America. This is what a new formal invention deserves. But Britain has not for more than a century had this honour of breeding such an inventor. It gives us a new sensation. In the world of sculpture the headquarters is now located here. Laurens, Lipchitz, Zadkine in France are fine artists: but the younger Henry Moore is their sculptural peer. His work makes theirs appear too closely allied to painting. Sculpturally his vision is the more complete, the more fundamentally three-dimensional. Therefore *as form* it is much richer, involving greater formal complexity.

There is no suggestion that Moore's figures are in any way the mere

sculptural counterpart of a merely visual or pictorial theme; of a Cubist image; or for that matter of anything else that is not essentially sculpture. They are fully and uniquely themselves. But that is not how these Parisian sculptors strike one, after considering Moore. Their work is Cubist painting rendered solid. And there is a further point. Moore's works reflect a fusion of a greater variety of separate elements than we are aware of in, let us say, Laurens. For instance, they are not formal at the expense of a non-formal content. The terrific plastic force of Moore is not an abstract entity, empty of poetry or personality, or of all that a deep connection with the human heart bestows. On the contrary, the plastic form of Henry Moore's sculpture is poetry, personality, spirit solidified. It is the visible shape whereby we are informed of certain profound intimations—intimations of mortality, one might justly call some of them. For they concern the relationship of our bodies to the earth, stressing analogies of structure in body and mountain. But whatever they betoken they are profoundly moving because profoundly mysterious: they are of profound importance because they are profoundly human. For what this judgement is worth, I personally feel sure that Henry Moore is a figure of greater significance and weight in the world of visual art than any painter or sculptor in France who is younger than Braque and Picasso.

What the French sculptors I have mentioned lack can be reduced to two qualities—or groups of qualities. They all lack, by comparison with Moore, the sense of sculptural absoluteness: and, secondly, they lack profundity of invention, or discovery. The first is more difficult than the second to describe: in a word, it is the quality which distinguishes sculpture from painting. Nothing in Moore's figures is exempt from the necessity to exist in the round: no graphic image is here superimposed upon, or there extracted from, the mass. The mass itself is the image you register from any of the infinite number of viewpoints. As you move in relation to the work, the work itself moves in your eye, expanding, contracting into a different shape, into a new variation of itself. Thus a truly sculptural image is not static, or restricted to a given viewpoint. It is perpetual; it is permanently mobile, so to speak. You only get it by circling about the sculpture many times: and even so, somewhere in between the 'front' and a 'side' view are numerous others which will at first have escaped you. Months of familiarity may still leave many significant aspects of a figure by Moore undiscovered: and this is where the French sculptors just named are so much less subtle—because less completely sculptural. Zadkine in particular suggests a

number of pictorial images welded together to make the three-dimensional form.

The second great quality, by reason of which such exceptional eminence is conferred upon Moore, is the quality of revolutionary poetic invention. Possession of the sculptural feeling alone would not suffice to make a man a great artist: the non-formal elements must also be exceptionally daring: they must represent an intuitive penetration to the depths of the psyche. This Moore also does. Indeed, the vast significance attaching to the blind smooth heads, the pot-holed torsos, the figures at once embryo-like and impersonal as the very structure of the Earth's timeless surface—all this is the side of Moore which first assailed the consciousness of his thousands of lay admirers. For them the potency of the psychic content in his sculpture was apparent long before a consideration of his innovations in form forced itself upon their conscious minds. A new world had been created in which new relationships were evident between man's body and his physical environment. But not only that. A new interplay was established between the imagination and physical reality: rhythmic formations in Nature leapt into sudden significance; a new beauty (previously identified with the insignificant or even the ugly) was uncovered. People saw Moore's shapes in the flints in their gardens—just as those saturated in Cézanne found, arriving in Provence, that La Montagne Ste. Victoire more closely resembled his canvases than any photograph.

In 1946 it happened that Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth exhibited their latest works in the same month, at different galleries in London. I think those two exhibitions should have been visited on the same day for the great contrast which the two artists then provided to be appreciated to the full. If, some years before that date, they might have been regarded as equally abstract, by 1946 they were already clearly moving in opposite directions; and this might have been felt instantly upon entering the second of the two exhibitions. Barbara Hepworth's rooms were infinitely cold; impersonal; sad; perfect after the Moores. The room which Henry Moore's works were temporarily inhabiting had quite another atmosphere: the feeling of human life and trouble hung heavy over the sculpture, a sculpture which had by then returned to the human figure for the expression of human emotions. Moore had never in fact wandered very far from this central theme of sculpture; but his exercises in abstract form could now be seen in perspective: already in 1946 they began to appear more as a develop-

ment in technique than as full expressions of their author's meaning; for the purely abstract was, in his first post-war exhibition, definitely submerged in a meaning that was not abstract. One could detect in the large reclining figure in stone in that exhibition (it is now in the garden of Dartington Hall) all the familiar abstract rhythms (so blunt and powerful and somehow square-round, implying the rectangular and the flowing at the same time). But they were just below the surface, one felt, contributing formal complexity and richness to the apparently much simpler and more figurative aspect that that surface had taken on. Abstract rhythms no longer dominated the whole; they were, so to speak, in the service of a purpose that was less easily defined, and more passionate, than they were themselves. Like Picasso, Henry Moore goes from mastery to mastery: and, like the great painter, he moves beyond the reach of mere formulae, unaffected, it seems, by anything other than the *feeling*, increasingly deep, by which he is dominated.

I hope the reader will recognize what I am trying to say. Those factors in visual experience which we isolate by the term 'abstract' should never be disparaged; we recognize the power to affect us that simple FORM has, devoid entirely of ulterior meaning. Abstract form—and all form, *as such*, is abstract—is the very language whereby visual and tactile experience (and many other kinds of experience) are communicated: it is a potent means, which, like any other means, has a fascination in and for itself (consider the fascination of isolated *words*). But we are not detracting one iota from the absolute nature of abstract form when we observe that the addition of layers of meaning of a totally different order is a possibility; and, in fact, that this process represents what was certainly the unconscious practice of the great artists of history almost without exception. This is only to say that a formal economy of expression has never existed stripped and naked of non-formal qualities: neither has it been the intention of painters or sculptors to create one, until the present century. And now that we have seen such as the proclaimed aim of a number of good artists of the present century, now that 'pure form' has been achieved, we can see at a glance how impure it is, and must remain; that is to say, we can recognise that what we experience in the works of Gabo, Ben Nicholson, Mondrian and Barbara Hepworth is as clearly a manifestation of sheer 'personality' as is the case with any other good artist whose mental orientation is of quite a different kind. Just what sort of 'personality' is expressed is another question (and it may even be the most important one): but that these manifestations, that this 'style', by

their nature transcend in purity and intensity other artistic modes is obviously untrue. The question as to whether an artist is a good or an indifferent artist is obviously more subtle and mysterious than the question as to whether his choice of means falls within a certain category, the category of abstract form. Abstract form, in other words, can be well or badly used: when it is well used, the artistic conviction which directs its use is still undefined, and the compulsion which we are subject to is also still unexplained. The further we press our enquiry as to the precise nature of that which moves us in sculpture or painting, the further the unexplained extends before us.

Moore's early work, apart from its Mexican influence, was a kind of sculptural Cubism—but *sculptural*, not semi-pictorial. He began by accepting a high degree of formalization: his *Mother and Child* in Hornton stone, of 1925, now in the Manchester City Art Gallery, is the sculptural equivalent in many ways of the Cubist portraits of Picasso and Braque. The form is expressed in a series of distinct planes, and the architectural build-up of the two figures into a pyramid, with the head of the child, which sits upon the mother's shoulders, clutching her head, as the apex, is reminiscent of the formal arrangement within the picture-frame which those portraits exemplify.

To say that Moore's subsequent development includes an exploration of abstract and semi-abstract forms from which he has evolved abstract rhythms of great originality and power is to pass over, in one sentence, the history of his development as an artist of unmistakable genius. (But I have no space here to trace that history). In that exhibition of 1946 there was a large reclining figure in wood which was distinct in almost every respect from the other one in stone, the one commissioned for the grounds of Dartington Hall. The former was one of the greatest examples of Moore's more surrealist mood; the mood which identifies the human figure both with the arrested surge of hills and certain physiological organs; which plays with that figure as water plays on rock, smoothing away and tunnelling away until fact and symbol are one; just as a pot-hole in a riverbed is both the physical reality resulting from the play of natural forces and yet the image which evokes those forces most powerfully. This was the figure which had a gigantic heart for its thorax.

Moore's movement from the 1925 *Mother and Child* to the Hornton stone reclining figure for Dartington Hall and the Northampton *Madonna and Child* of 1944, for instance, seems, I suggest, a progress in the contrary direction to that which we saw in painting from

Cézanne onwards. What I wish to suggest in connection with the sculpture of Henry Moore is briefly this: starting with the play of planes over his forms there is one aspect of his development—that which leads up through the *Madonna and Child* of 1944, through the stone *Reclining Figure* for Dartington of 1945, to the *Three Standing Figures* of 1947-48 (now in Battersea Park), or, more obviously still, to the large *Family Group* of 1949—which may be regarded as a movement away from abstraction. With such works as these we feel that Moore has at last peeled off the Cubist planes; or, rather, that the human figure with its roundness and wholeness is emerging again, with a grandeur and formal austerity that suggests that it has abstract blood in its bones (if I may be allowed the phrase). At any rate, I feel that these and similar works contain all the Cubist's formal experience added to something as human and profoundly moving as the feeling that Renoir had. Nevertheless, everyone responds with an unquiet thrill to the typical streamlined, seal-like, almost featureless head of a Moore. A hundred disturbing suggestions interpose themselves: is this seal-head an atom-blasted friend of ours? What inescapable schizophrenia emanates from the two blind, equal, knob-heads of the *Standing Figure* of 1950? What contemporary blindness seems symbolized by the 'blind' heads on their craning, swaying, anxiously turning necks? What arouses the *Draped Reclining Figure*, of 1953, from her couch, so that she hastily raises herself on both elbows simultaneously? What cosmic catastrophe compels the attention, even of these terrified vertibrates? That is one aspect of his symbolism. The reverse is the touching humanity of his late *Family Group* series.

BARBARA HEPWORTH

Barbara Hepworth's sculpture shows none of this rich fusion of different levels of experience. It is purer, in the sense of being more consistently abstract: and more abstract, and more influenced by Gabo's transparent sculpture, in her works in stone than in those in wood. For wood has a grain; and such obvious rhythms as this reveals cannot but influence the forms which a sensitive sculptor chooses: her wood sculptures, therefore, have a kind of wood-abstract quality; they are the result of the co-operation of sculptor and material. In spite of the fact that they 'represent' nothing, that they exist 'in and for themselves', these wood forms have considerable wood personality! This element of 'personality' is always present (and far more in the wood than the stone forms) in spite of the intense, exclusive concentration

upon formal relations; the attempt to develop form out of form for form. In this effort there is the illusion of something 'scientific'; in its impersonalness there is the feeling that something 'objective' and ultra-classical is being achieved by the conscious exclusion of so many kinds of emotion. Whether or not there is anything in such an idea—whether in fact it is an *idea* at all—we must note that this abstract art of Barbara Hepworth is actually an unusually subjective one, since the intuition which determines the form has also somehow to supply something to take the place which, in other kinds of art, is filled by 'subject' or representational 'idea'.

Barbara Hepworth's distorted spheres, her variations upon egg forms, complicated by partial planing and scooping out and tunnelling, are, as I said, devoid entirely of representational intention, and express with brilliant directness (and as the result of great technical skill) their maker's intuitions of such natural forces (it seems to me) as are displayed in the action of waves upon pebbles, for instance. There the moving water and time invariably reduce the jagged rhythms of a chip of granite to ones which bear closer relation to the sphere. Pebbles are beautiful and they are never exactly alike: Barbara Hepworth's sculpture has a beauty of this order. It is possessed of a passionate coldness. Although allied at the level of form to Henry Moore (but the form of her 'forms' is far simpler than Moore's), she is at the very opposite pole so far as temperament and feeling are concerned.

For the sculptor, form and space are always actual, not illusory: the illusion of either is the painter's province. When the sculptor drives a narrowing tunnel through wood or stone he is creating a physical reality in terms of actual space—or, rather, in terms of solid form meeting a defined aerial space at a mutual boundary of definition. The surface, of wood or stone, *is* that defining boundary, definitive of a solid (reading inwards) and a volume of air (reading outwards): the true sculptor thus creates in terms of volume, and whether the work is abstract or figurative, we inevitably apprehend it at first as a harmony of contrasted volumes—volume in every case becoming articulate as form. Barbara Hepworth has always thought in these terms. Indeed, the main criticism which her work has prompted in me from time to time has been that the formal discipline was too intense; the concentration on formal purity had excluded every non-formal ingredient.

If Barbara Hepworth enjoys a reputation unrivalled by any other woman artist in this country, this pre-eminence is due not only to the

quality of her vision but also to her mastery of a masculine technique. Many woman sculptors model in clay—very few carve stone, or even wood. Yet it is essentially as a carver that Barbara Hepworth approaches sculpture. At her best she has bent this carving technique to the service of a three-dimensional imagery that no male artist could have conceived; and this is one of the qualities in her work that fascinates: we find a lyrical, feminine line everywhere breaking out among the masses of an art form, an idiom, which one thinks of as masculine. It is by no means always the volume or the mass of her sculptural form that chiefly pleases one: as often as not the linear rhythms, that emerge when two planes meet in her surfaces, are the first to arrest one's eye. And planes are always meeting in this way in her sculpture, because her surfaces are not often continuous: they are always going round corners; indeed, they often consist of a series of clearly distinguished facets. (Admittedly I am thinking here of some of her more recent works—examples of which are the *Cosdon Head*, *Biolith* and *Contrapuntal Forms*—the latter once stood near the Dome of Discovery at the South Bank Festival Exhibition.) Unlike Henry Moore, from whose example she has certainly learnt much, Barbara Hepworth does not conceive of form from the inside outwards, but the other way round, from the outside inwards, or so it appears to me. And this is the reason her planes are so much emphasized, remaining clearly discernible even when they are blended together by a rounding off of the slight ridges where they meet, or run one into the next.

In other words, I believe Barbara Hepworth's approach to volume and mass is pre-eminently visual. I feel that it is by *looking* at her block of wood or stone—from the outside—that she decides on her forms at each stage in their emergence, taking off first a slice here and then a slice there—compressing the core of the mass between the planes of its own surface. One does not feel that a sculpture by Barbara Hepworth has *grown* from tiny to big; there is no feeling of her forms having expanded from an original germ until, like fruit or living creatures, they are full and ripe. Her forms seem to have been arrived at by a process almost the opposite of that of growing flesh. Instead of expanding from the inside, they have been shaped by a wearing away from the outside. Their peculiar beauty, their unique poetic quality, is that of smooth, weather-worn, grooved, fluted or hollowed-out objects such as seashore pebbles and shells, wooden pier stakes, half-burnt logs or rain-washed rock. Like these, her sculpture bears the imprint of vast, impersonal forces, the forces that produce erosion in a hundred

different forms. If her sculpture, like the worn pebble, gives off a sense of space far in excess of the actual space that it itself inhabits, it is because the forces of space—of sea and wind, as it were—have done the shaping, and produced this cold, other-worldly, moonlike, feminine imagery.

Barbara Hepworth's development as a sculptor falls into three distinct periods. First came the early figurative carvings in which the frequent changes of idiom were an indication of growth and a capacity for aesthetic exploration, rather than uncertainty. Indeed, the accomplishment she showed in any one of the first eleven works numbered in the catalogue of her Retrospective Exhibition at Wakefield in 1951, was such that she need have explored no further if a distinguished reputation had been all she was in search of. But she never rests long in one place: and towards the end of this first period, in, for instance, *Mother and Child: Pink Ancaster Stone*, 1934, she was moving rapidly away from figuration towards abstraction.

Complete abstraction was arrived at in 1934, and from then until 1948 all trace of representational or figurative form was banished from her sculpture. In the smooth, geometric forms—geometric in suggestion more often than in fact—of this abstract period Barbara Hepworth first isolated those shapes, those movements of form, which register most clearly the 'wearing away' actions of air and water, which I have already mentioned. Stripped of any figurative function, her forms now expressed these movements in their purest, most extreme aspect: some of her titles indicate the nature of her form at this time. For instance we get *Pierced Hemisphere; Conoid, Sphere and Hollow; Oval Sculpture; Helicoids in Sphere* or *Convolute*. The words themselves invite one to seek no further than the actual form of the stone itself for meaning. And thus focused, the mind may re-discover the beauty and significance of the elementary formal relationships inherent in the structure of solid matter, relationships which she demonstrates in her distorted spheres, her hollowed-out egg forms or her single, springing columns or pillars, with their suggestion of an inverted, attenuated cone. Even more than Arp she has laid emphasis in her non-figurative work upon an impersonal purity of line and contour which is, in fact, one of her most personal qualities. With her, mass is a comparatively neutral, disenchanted force. Unlike Moore's, her *mass* is, one feels, simply the volume a lively line or silhouette bequeaths inescapably. Line, not mass, is the living reality in a Hepworth sculpture. And by using the word 'purity' in this context I suspect that what I am trying to suggest is a quality that, in the final analysis, would have to be called *mathe-*

matical—geometric as opposed to organic; crystalline as opposed to the richer more complex shapes of, say, the biological world. Organic shapes carry overtones, are more suggestive of something else: they often act as visual metaphors, evoking the warm, familiar forms of physiological life—and even of Man himself. But Barbara Hepworth's abstract pieces have always a cosmic coldness—'cosmic' because the perfect sphere is only found, perhaps, in the natural world, in the astral bodies that float in outer space.

But all this time, too, she was developing an ascetic concern for the purely structural aspects of her forms: in her carvings of this period she would explore the structural forces and tensions manifest in the simplest of nature's sculptural objects, like the seashore stones and shells I have mentioned. Shells display a fascinating relationship between smooth convex surfaces on the outside, and a twisting, possibly fluted, concave surface on the inside. The results of her meditations upon such themes as this seem evident in a work like *Oval Sculpture, Beechwood and White Paint* (dating from 1943), which is a most beautiful and original thing—light, airy, taut and utterly self-contained in its perfect balance and unity—and also in the exquisite and extremely economical *The Wave, Wood with Colour and Strings*, 1943-44. The twisting cavities, the diminishing tunnels, have been scooped out and worn smooth by the great impersonal anonymous forces of exterior space. Nothing could be more remote from human kind than these superbly cold, calm, faceless works in an abstract idiom. And again we may remark the contrast with Moore, whose figures are saturated by human feeling and personality.

Barbara Hepworth's third phase began in 1947 or 1948. It reveals a slow return to near-figuration; to the creation of forms that contain a comment on realities outside themselves, which the completely abstract (or non-figurative) work does not. In most of the works of this third period it is the human form that everywhere begins to emerge, pressing through the skin of the springing column or the flattened lopsided sphere. I say human; but possibly the sort of beings evoked in some of these later sculptures are visitors from another planet. Or are they aquatic in origin? There are no separate, articulated limbs, free of the body. And it is interesting to see that the geometric quality is now rarely in evidence. The shallow convexities of the surface planes increase in subtlety: indeed, they occasionally become too subtle to relate satisfactorily with the mass behind them and then we almost have the feeling that a loose silk garment is obscuring our view of the

real, the underlying form. But not for long. The bare bones of the structure are there, like rock under the grass. If Barbara Hepworth had long been exclusively preoccupied with structure, there were soon signs that, in her work, of this latest phase (from 1947), her figures were almost succeeding in putting on that flesh which, before, they had always, so to speak, rejected. And this continues to be the tone of her work up to the present time.

The addition of an element of representation has resulted in her abstract rhythm being elevated from a geometrical to a poetic condition. Instead of a demonstration in stone of the mechanics of form, we are now presented with an image, and an image, often, of great beauty.

To describe this beauty is not easy. Where Henry Moore involves us always in human loves and fears—troubled emotion concerning our own origin and fate—Barbara Hepworth's world is crystalline, remote; her beings are visitors from a subterranean or a lunar region. Indeed, her superbly simple *The Cosdon Head* has the lively, rocking, lopsided form of the waning moon and wears the same expression—inscrutable, cosmic, remote; but alive. It is very natural that this new willingness to admit into her works the disturbing and disordering representational element should be accompanied by a less stringent, less geometrical attitude to the actual forms themselves.

It is a possible criticism of Barbara Hepworth's sculpture that in her eagerness not to violate her material she in fact allows it to influence, or modify, her conception too much. The sculptural problem she sets herself is not usually as complex as that of a Moore reclining figure: indeed, it frequently involves no more than a single trunk variously planed and gouged—for example *Rhythmic Form*, 1949, in rosewood. Even the mother and child, *Eocene*, of the same date, is but a single body of stone, eaten away by concavities at the front, like an extremely complicated sea-rock (but possibly this piece is also too pictorial in its rhythms?). She rarely tackles the sort of problem you get when the arm leaves the main body at the shoulder and, after piercing space with the elbow returns to it again at the hip. There are no complex bridges of this sort. To all this, however, it could be replied that she has made the single, slim, taut, gouged, slightly bending column her own: that, for her artistic purpose, she has no need to cut away as deeply as Moore, for instance: that the exquisite and comparatively shallow undulations of a tense surface, in which the concave and convex are fascinatingly interwoven, is adequate recompense for the absence of weightier contrasts.

Perhaps the most ambitious of these semi-figurative works was *Biolith*, which dates from 1949. Completely original, and remarkably successful, this ton of blue ancaster stone has the outline—again—of the waning (or waxing?) moon: in mass a flattened sphere, grooved down the middle and pierced by a hole which becomes the second eye of two faces engraved on back and front. Thus one profile of a face is visible from any angle and this may be doubled by a shadow in a certain light, giving the suggestion of a face in movement—the natural turning movement of head and neck. A work of this quality is a work of poetic as well as plastic invention. And this mood has lasted. Between 1949 and 1952 her preoccupation with streamlined, vertical, limbless forms suggestive of torsos continues. Many of her pieces are figures nearly human. Some of these new vertical figure forms, in honey- or wine-coloured woods, twist upwards, lean, and almost sway with a life if not that of trees perhaps of . . . tree-spirits! Whereas her stone is sometimes impersonal to the point of being dead —dead of over-refinement—her wood forms breathe: they are statements about personality and about the personality of wood. It is still true, as I have said, that all her shapes have been produced essentially *from the outside*—rather than felt from the inside outwards. She is visual where most sculptors are tactile in their approach. Her forms interest more for their profiles than for their volumes; they have nothing of that extreme subtlety of movement in the surface which can only result from the second process—the process where the sculptor, working blind, makes his form from the blind muscular dictates of his own hands, arms, his whole body . . . and then, when he pauses, *looks* at the result, as if for the first time. Yet her opposite method of constructing her forms, at each stage, to the demands of a most sensitive eye, has had its reward. She has created a species of perfection.

ALEXANDER CALDER

Modern sculpture exists in three forms: as an arrangement of voluminous solids; or of moving limbs; or of open, cage-like configurations. I have dealt with the first category; now to the second. Everyone is nowadays familiar with abstract sculpture that moves—that is to say, with the 'mobiles' that Alexander Calder invented as long ago as 1932—or, rather more likely perhaps, everyone knows the popular derivations from Calder. We call to mind Calder's tinkling metal leaves trembling on the tips of a series of slender wire antennae;

or we think of a number of balls of different sizes, balanced along thin metal rods, and moving like a system of revolving planets. By way of definition, we might say that a mobile is an abstract configuration of articulated parts in which each part, or segment, is free to describe a movement of its own; but it is a motion, conditioned by, yet distinct from, the movements of all the other articulate segments of which the total construction is made up. The apparently arbitrary movement of these free segments, or limbs, produces a sort of visual counterpoint—*contrapuntal* is the only word which can suggest that related opposition of different motions, differing patterns of rhythmic movement, which the loose arms of a mobile render visible. We may note that rhythm is actual (in an exact musical, not metaphorical, sense) in the mobile—for the simple reason that movement is actual; indeed, the mobile embodies the idea that physical motion can itself become the vehicle of pure formal expression.

Apparently the first ideas for mobile sculpture, at any rate in modern times, were not Calder's; but then the results, if these ideas had been executed, would not have greatly resembled Calder's mobiles, since they involved constructions powered by clock-work and capable, therefore, of only a limited repertoire of more or less mechanical gestures. This is not the discovery for which Calder is renowned and which has made him—at any rate until Jackson Pollock's arrival—the sole American artist of our time with an international reputation. Calder's mobiles depend primarily upon the motion of the surrounding air for their movement, a movement that appears to be free or arbitrary, organic as opposed to mechanical. Actually, a chart of all the movements, and all the permutations of movement, possible to a given mobile could presumably be arrived at by someone possessed of scientific patience and thoroughness. But this does not alter the fact that these mobiles *appear* free; the leaves and branches of a tree in the wind demonstrate such an infinitude of motions that we are continuously surprised and refreshed by their novelty, and easily discount the possibility of a mathematical basis for their perpetual balancing act.

I think it is true to say that the *movements* of which Calder's tin leaves on their long stalks are capable are of far greater aesthetic interest than the *shapes* themselves. Indeed, the actual forms which Calder uses, the actual profiles he chooses for his thin metal weights—the 'leaves', as I have been calling them—are sometimes rather derivative. At their best the profiles of these weights suggest nasturtium leaves or blunt-nosed, tail-less flatfish; or they may consist of asymmetric discs

or lop-sided diamond shapes; or bean or kidney shapes; or a shape somewhere between an irregular, round leaf and a painter's palette. A number of the forms I have just described might have a roundish hole or two cut out here and there. But Calder has, one feels, drawn heavily from contemporary painters for all the forms he uses in his mobiles. In particular, he seems to be indebted to Joan Miró. Yet no tin or iron or aluminium weight that he has ever shaped has been given a form quite as original as one might wish. Calder introduced the element of motion; and with it the mechanics of an elaborately extended pair of scales: both these elements have a greater aesthetic interest than the weights themselves.

But the point is, of course, that even if the leaf-shaped weights are dull and meaningless, considered as separate, static entities they gain life miraculously the moment they are assembled in the mobile. Thus Calder shows us that simply by juxtaposition and, above all, by movement, quite unimpressive fragments may assume, in consort, imaginative significance and affective power. It might even be argued that if Calder's mobiles are remarkable for their ability to render a design visible in terms of movement through space and time, for all physical movement involves both, then it does not much matter what form is given to the objects which demonstrate this movement. That they are solid and are impelled along certain invisible but prescribed routes through the surrounding and supporting air is all that is required of them—it might be said. Although this would be an ingenious defence, I do not think it would dispose of the objections I have just raised. For Calder himself poses the problem: clearly he is always searching for a new and more satisfying formula for shaping 'the weights' in his system of 'scales'. Clearly he does his utmost to bestow personality, to create form, to give magic, to the weights he dangles before us. Sometimes he succeeds triumphantly: the largest mobile in the exhibition which he held at the Lefevre Gallery in 1951 was wonderfully alive and threatening, in the way that a poisonous plant in the tropical jungle is threatening. As the huge black water-lily leaves carved their horizontal way, waveringly, towards one, the feeling suddenly arose that they might sting or simply slice one—very gently, but fatally—in passing! It was a live creation. And by contrast it showed that a number of the other mobiles in the room lacked this living personality; were too like ingenious toys.

What of the mobile's future? In which direction is a new development possible or likely? I should say that it is more probable in

connection with the forms that are used as weights than with the mechanics of balance and movement. Calder has explored the mathematical potentialities of the mobile much more thoroughly than the aesthetic; indeed, the aesthetic possibilities are still very considerable; without departing far from the established mechanics of Calder, it would be possible to produce totally different effects by showing a new inventiveness in the design of the weights used. Why, for instance, should they always be flat silhouettes or orbs? There is no reason why one should not design something like a cage, a structure as three-dimensionally complex as an iron sculpture by Reg Butler, for each of the weights; these could be shaped and hung in such a way as to overlap or penetrate one another in passing—like a key turning through a lock.

A word about the mechanics of mobiles. The principle of construction is simple: a thin bar or rod, straight or bent, is suspended more or less horizontally by a wire from the ceiling or from the arm of a specially constructed metal support. Whether the point of balance, to which the wire is attached, falls in the centre of this bar or towards one end depends upon the weights, which are, in turn, suspended from it. Since all the wire links by means of which each weight and each 'pair of scales' is suspended are more or less flexible, the total construction is flexible. A multiplicity of sinuous, thrusting movements, apparently in all directions, is possible simultaneously.

I said earlier on that I thought that the aesthetic rather than the mechanical aspect of the mobile was the most fruitful for new discoveries. But what is certain is that a lively sense of mechanical invention is a prerequisite, no less than a keen aesthetic sense, in whoever hopes to extend this new medium of visual art beyond the confines of its present limitations—which are the artistic limitations of its inventor's personality. Alexander Calder, the American, has succeeded in creating a new art form—and that is a very considerable achievement; it would not be altogether surprising if it turned out that he had also said the last word in the idiom which he himself has invented.

Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth carve solid materials in the round. Moore's greatest single formal innovation—the discovery of 'the hole'—in no way invalidates this statement. Indeed, the great formal significance (its psychological significance is another matter) of the hole piercing a mass from side to side is precisely that it enhances that mass *as mass*. Moore's tunnels and cavities added an immensely

expressive device to the sculptor's means, or vocabulary, for expressing form as such. Because it increased the expressive surface which a figure of a given size exposes to the air and light, it therefore increased the area of definition, which is, simply that surface. Surface is all, to a sculptor of solid forms: he cannot give immediate definition to the heart of a piece of stone—he has to direct feeling and meaning *inwards*, into the block, from the manipulated surface. The surface is all that he touches: it is the sole agent of expression: the only part of a block he *can* manipulate. Therefore a surface which is increased merely in extent—in relation to a given block or mass—represents an extension of the means of expression. Moore's holes are an additional device for defining mass.

However, the latest development in sculpture, in England (and elsewhere), represents a complete break with this tradition of 'solid' form; form which exists, that is, as a *volume* of the material of wood, stone or whatever it may be. A number of the younger English sculptors have lately been exclusively engaged in the creation of cage-like figures which consist solely of a system of thin bars, rods, prongs and rungs. The idiom is thus a linear one. Iron is the favoured material for the construction of this 'open sculpture', and most of these sculptors use it. One of them, Robert Adams, constructs in slim wooden rods, laths or struts: another, F. E. McWilliam, uses a plastic metal and wire: Kenneth Armitage still casts in bronze—but his variations on the common theme are more plastic, involving a single, web-like plane which runs through his small Indian-club figures, uniting them. Lynn Chadwick, Geoffrey Clarke and Reg Butler—who is the father of the whole movement here in England—are faithful to iron or steel, while Eduardo Paolozzi and William Turnbull prefer plaster. This, incidentally, was the school of sculptors represented, with such extraordinary success, at the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of 1952.

Moore, of course, can be felt in the background: but his successors are not his followers in a literal sense. All we can say at the moment is that the present little outcrop of new British sculptors are, with one or two exceptions, very far from being dominated by Moore, though they certainly owe a great deal to his example and, as it were, to the presence of his achievement. For too long we have laboured under a sense of innate inferiority where the visual arts were concerned. Nothing has contributed more to the improved morale of our younger painters and sculptors than the world-wide fame which Moore has won since the end of the war—and is still winning.

REG BUTLER

The most powerful and mature of these younger sculptors is Reg Butler,[1] who forges and welds his figures out of rods of steel. And it is a vital characteristic of Butler that his 'figures' are, almost without exception, human figures. Portraits, in point of fact. Never non-figurative. Others will follow—or try to follow—in his footsteps so far as the material and the technique are concerned: but Butler is the first British sculptor to use this material. Julio Gonzales and Picasso (who was helped by Gonzales) have made spiky, open sculptures in iron in the past: but Butler is unlike either in insisting that every limb of the figure—every bar, finger, prong or cross-piece—must be beaten out at the forge: or so arrived at, by means of the electro-welder and oxy-acetylene flame, that it no longer has the quality of *rods assembled.* In other words, he is the first blacksmith sculptor. A Reg Butler has the organic cohesion and unity of feeling that suggests that all its parts have grown, by some unnameable natural process, one out of another. Under his touch iron spawns, flowers, sprouts, cascades: or freezes into delicacy. Thus, the actual surfaces of his metal figures, with their pock-marked, encrusted 'ancient' quality, are no stylistic addition—they are not a sort of patina; they are the natural result of his methods of construction. For instance, Butler constructs the occasional flat or convex shields, which are balanced here and there among the thorn-like rods, by welding numerous thin steel rods together, side by side. The ribbed surface (what is left of each rod's original smoothness alternating with the ditches of molten steel which unite them) of these shields is one very typical result.

But Butler is no less original in his aesthetic than in his technical aspect. For him, form is largely an aerial volume enclosed by a wire-like frame. I do not wish to suggest, however, that his work is lacking in plastic feeling. Wherever plastic quality is needed in his sculpture it is almost certain to be found: one finds it in those 'shields', in the heads, and even in the tendon-like limbs themselves.

With Moore, sculptural expression resides primarily in the movements of an extensive, smooth surface: the form is the voluminous

[1] In view of the world-wide renown which his winning of the 'Unknown Political Prisoner' competition has conferred on Reg Butler I feel that I might be allowed to say that *all* my comments upon his open work (including his 'Prisoner') reprinted here were written well in advance of that triumphal result.

form of a mass—of wood, lead or stone. Even when, as in a recent figure, Moore's forms consist of very slim, taut legs (the double-headed, open *Standing Figure* of 1950)—almost as long and thin as those of an ostrich—the section of any limb at any point is magnificently fleshy, magnificently plastic. Thus Moore, even in his most 'open' figures, does not abandon plastic solidity for something we occasionally see in Giacometti and always in Butler—something I can only refer to as the projection in space of an ideographic line-drawing. But Giacometti's is a commonplace vision once we have subtracted this original element—his use of *the space between* the very thin, solid forms. These forms of his, when we come to examine them, are little more than literary devices—a very, very thin man whose body has been eaten into by the surrounding air as if that air were sulphuric acid. The thin man himself is naturalistic, impressionistic: not a fraction of the formal genius of Moore, or Butler, is in evidence in such skinny dolls. But, to complete the contrast I was making between form in Moore and form in Butler, let me simply repeat that Butler's thin limbs and bars make their effect by *enclosing*; by defining spatial areas, in three dimensions; just as the lines of a drawing enclose white areas of paper. And Butler's 'sketches' consist of little models or figures, executed swiftly with thin, soft, pliable wire: thus he *draws in space*, to work out his ideas—and incidentally these tiny models are as appropriate in scale to such indoor 'sites' for sculpture as the mantelpiece or bookshelf as his fifteen-foot steel figures would be for a London square, if London had the wit to employ such an artist.

One of the disturbing features of our time is the speed with which a genuine movement in the arts can be degraded by its own success. No sooner had Butler begun to get a hearing—or should I say 'a viewing'? —for his work than a surprising number of fashionable derivations appeared. The obvious novelty of the form and medium perhaps gave imitators more of a handle to get hold of than is the case with other forms. But this sudden mushrooming of 'the open principle' in metal sculpture occurred simultaneously right across the world in 1951 and 1952: so that by 1953 the international sculpture competition, arranged by the Institute of Contemporary Arts, in London, on the theme of 'The Unknown Political Prisoner' amassed a quite amazing number of gaunt, academic spike-and-prong sculptures. I am not suggesting that Butler's influence extended far beyond our own shores prior to this

historic event: some theory of *Zeitgeist* is the only answer to the question of its cause.

It so happened that the preliminary exhibition of British entries coincided with an exhibition of the sculpture of Henri Matisse at the Tate Gallery. I could not but feel that the crisis in sculpture had become poignantly plain that week with the coincidence of these two exhibitions. Virtually the whole of the sculpture of Matisse, together with many brilliant luminous drawings and three fine paintings, were to be seen at the Tate: while at the New Burlington Galleries there were the twelve winning entries, as well as thirty-three runners-up, in the British section of the I.C.A.'s Competition. The Matisse exhibition, I felt, could not be more serenely humanist: the *Prisoner* exhibition could not be more hollow and gesticulatory, more emptily Expressionist. At the Tate—the benign lucidity of a great classical artist whose genius (as a painter) has enabled him to liberate colour; to trap the light of the sun and project it, in washes of unprecedented brilliancy, as the essential concomitant of designs of an austere spontaneity. At the New Burlington—the weak frenzy, the tortuous, unreal complexities of a new expressionism, dark and thorny with fashionable doubts and fears, giving birth to bleak, anaemic or turgid forms which spring as much from formal inaptitudes as from any genuine, compelling *Angst*. There were exceptions—which I'll come to later. But it seemed to me that the repetitive spikiness of all those iron thorns and cacti (preferably iron already showing signs of rust: our northern romanticist bias welcomes this element of archaicism) were a thin cliché by now. And did they not stem from that strong native source, the art of the graphic illustrator (say, a Sutherland indian-ink thorn bush) rather more than from any sculptural idiom?

Taken together, I feel that these two exhibitions, coinciding thus in January 1953, illustrated very clearly the dilemma facing this talented group of young British sculptors whose 'open' metal configurations has come to assume the proportions of a school. Their dilemma is twofold. In the first place, can the new 'open' form continue, now, to assist the sculptor in the expression of his deepest conviction? Or must he return to the closed form that is common both to academic tradition and to Henry Moore? Can he continue to 'draw in space' by means of string-like bars and spindly rods, arriving at the now almost too-familiar cage- or frame-like structure? Or must he again resort to the more plastic expressiveness (involving mass) which demands the closed form with its continuous, modulated surface?

This is the formal problem—the dilemma of sculptural means. The second problem lies in the less specialist sphere of subject-matter, of poetry if you like. Must the total feeling or meaning of a work continue to be deliriously expressionist, lorn, anguished? Or is this attitude itself now almost an academic posture? In so far as this thorn aesthetic results from a consciously deliberate choice, it may only be an affair of fashion, and therefore assailable. To many of the sculptors in this competition one would have suggested that it might be exciting, now, to aim deliberately at something quite opposite—something approaching the 'fruit aesthetic' of Matisse, perhaps? It would be impertinent, of course, to include Reg Butler himself in this class. He had, by the subtle force of his discoveries, already set the tone of this movement; already he had exerted a most extensive influence within this country. Butler is not only a fine artist, he is a man possessed. I am tempted to call him the Kafka of modern sculpture: this theme of *The Unknown Political Prisoner* might have been made for him. His own entry was most moving and alarming. It consists of a minute slender-limbed iron tripod mounted on rock: there is a ragged hole in the centre of the roughly triangular platform into which a vertical rod plunges from high above the platform. Various simple frames flank this platform on two sides with rectangular rhythms and the suggestion of tiny ladders or racks: and there is another minute ladder hinted at on one of the three main legs of the structure. Suddenly, looking down, away from this vacant piece of scaffolding, utterly devoid of anthropomorphic forms, one sees on the rock between the tripod's legs three tiny human figures gazing upwards. The shock is complete. Suddenly one grasps the implication of scale. This, then, is a vast . . . gallows. An empty scaffold towering above diminutive humanity. All the impersonal cruelty latent in 'the State' seems summed up in this horrible machine.

No; in Butler's case the *Angst* is real. But it is *matched* by an impeccable formal sense, a gift for architectonic form, which restrains the Kafkaesque fantasy and harnesses it to the purposes of art. Butler is as elegant as Picasso, formally speaking. F. E. McWilliam's two figures of Cain breaking Abel is also exempt from my criticisms above: its cruelty is the cruelty of Cain to Abel, of man to man; but not of McWilliam to sculptural form. On the other hand some of the better works in this preliminary exhibition of British entries did not wake up to the subject at all: Barbara Hepworth's or Paolozzi's, for instance. And how the British judges came to prefer the tawdry sentiment of

certain naturalistic bound figures to a number of entries which we saw they rejected, was certainly a mystery.

Since I wrote the foregoing paragraphs the art of Reg Butler has turned several corners and arrived—with amazing speed, considering the radical nature of the changes involved—at a condition, or degree, of realism which few could have foreseen. In 1952 Butler largely gave up forging in iron and steel and took to modelling in wax or plaster, casting the resulting 'solid' figures in a variety of metal alloys. Although he had at this time sustained an injury which for a while had prevented him wielding the heavy tools of his 'blacksmith's art', the profound change of emphasis was surely not so much caused as accelerated by this accident. No vital artist finds it possible suddenly to exempt himself from the implications of his work to date: 'the next stage', whatever it is, will always be the result of a mutation—a logical change in the growth of a personal style. A common germ infects all the separate periods, however distinct. Only a superficial or merely fashionable artist can allow himself to make departures which will never be seen (however long we give them) to stem from a single basic sensibility or intelligence (Picasso is no exception to this rule: but with him the personal traits which give unity to his styles are very numerous). Indeed, the problem is, often, not to show that an artist has retained his identity, despite drastic changes in the forms his work takes on; but rather to persuade people that those forms have, in fact, changed. The essential personality dominating all Reg Butler's earlier, open, more abstract sculpture is so clearly retained in his new, more realist works that one is tempted to expatiate wholly on the formal differences between the two. These, of course, are not difficult to indicate in Butler's case: he moved from an *open* to a *closed* idiom: wrought-iron cage-figures have given way to figures possessing a continuous solid surface which seals off their interior volumes from the exterior world. In other words, where a woman's figure might be evoked by aerial, three-dimensional lines of wire 'drawing' in his earlier style, that figure is given a continuous skin in his later. *To that extent* it looks more like a woman. On the other hand, because Butler is a creative artist and not an unthinking, unfeeling automaton invested with an ability to copy, his new, supposedly more naturalistic figures are often in fact more, not less, distorted than his open iron cage-figures were. That is to say, where the main proportions of a wire or iron figure were sometimes those of human beings (the length and the suggested volume of legs, pelvis, thorax, shoulders, head and arms all

being 'right') the same measurements are violated, more often than not, in the new solid, 'more lifelike' figures. But then, realism in painting or sculpture is not identifiable with the attainment of a degree of verisimilitude between the created image and some real object or other. Realism is the resurrection, in terms of form, of significant fragments of a visual experience: I say 'fragments' because to present, *in toto*, the visual apprehension of a scene or subject is an absolute impossibility. *Selection* is therefore as operative in the creation of a realist work as in that of an abstract one. Nor does the true realist passively imitate: he recreates as vigorously as any—*and he always distorts, in order to present us with the idea that he is not distorting.* For this reason the great realists are preoccupied with purely formal problems and considerations. When Reg Butler was making his early, supremely architectural, near-abstract sculptures he was obsessed with questions of the non-formal, expressionist content of sculpture: now, when his images are nearer to those of natural appearance, his conversation reveals an almost exclusive preoccupation with questions of form. A realist image is always composed out of abstract form.

By the end of 1951 the open iron sculpture which Butler pioneered in England was already fast becoming the plaything of lesser talents: so much so that an attempt obviously had soon to be made to find a way out of this iron thicket. Butler himself had done more with this form of sculpture than anyone since Julio Gonzales and Picasso first created it twenty years earlier. He had made of it an art form capable of a wide range of expression: the purely architectonic, formal cages of his earlier works were as calmly beautiful as the later, agitated, expressionist, Baconesque things were disquieting. But by 1951-52 the linear elements—the 'drawing in space' with metal strings as pliant to his will as a charcoal line is to the painter's—were getting out of hand: over-complex, almost *art nouveau* ornate, e.g. the legs, but not the superb heads or torsos, of *The Children*, 1951. He had to break out of the tangle his new language had woven round his essential images.

The process of defeating the linear began in 1952 with a series of pieces, such as *Study for Head and Shoulders*, in which the skeletal formations are partially contained and covered in by floating bronze plates, shaped like bust-bodices, placed before and behind the thorax. These encasing plates of armour gradually expanded round the airy figure until, by 1953, they had met all the way round it; it was thus rendered a 'solid' rather than a skeletal sculpture. (That description dramatizes somewhat a process that was gradual and instinctive.)

By 1954 Butler was ready to exhibit a figure, cast in metal and entitled *Girl*, from which the linear scaffolding is entirely absent—except for a trace remaining in the form of the small T-shaped rail on which she stands (the effect of this is to raise, and thus dissociate, the mass of the figure from the mass of the pedestal, giving it a freedom of action, as it were; and defeating the impression that so many figures give of being immovably rooted in the too-solid material of their bases). This *Girl* stands erect, naked except for a crumpled shirt she is in the act of pulling up—up off naked breasts—over her head, which is therefore tipped so that her face looks skyward, waiting for the raised arms (elbows up and out: hands down at collar level: a wing-like arrangement) to flick the garment off over it. Despite one or two formal clichés (the head, for instance, is almost non-existent as a *skull*: the face is merely a flat horizontal surface terminating the column of the neck, which expands in diameter as it rises: this head-cliché derives from Moore's 'seal' heads. And the very thin, tapering legs get *too* thin towards the ankles)—despite these faults it is immediately apparent that this figure has great vitality. Although the thinness of legs and arms gives her the appearance of a fleshy insect, this *Girl* is intensely alive, vulnerable, naked and erotic. She is a woman. There can hardly be better examples of distortion being the vehicle for conveying an impression of normality in a figure. This desirable young creature possesses, one suddenly realizes, an enormous pot-belly, stretched taut as a gourd: her hips have vanished: her back has a vertical gouged valley all the way up it: her elbows have the pointed, round sharpness of spars: and so on. These all work—they communicate Reg Butler's acid eroticism, his lust for a flesh made into spiky machines of sculptural efficacy. Only the lower reaches of the belly possibly reveal an area of formal deadness. And I think that the type of stylized forms I have just complained of are no longer in evidence in Reg Butler's latest figures of female standing nudes (I write this in November 1954), which at last show no anxiety whatever to echo the *personage* quality of a Picasso shield-head pin-figure. Butler has found himself in a wrestle with natural forms which reminds one of no one if not Rodin.

HENRI MATISSE

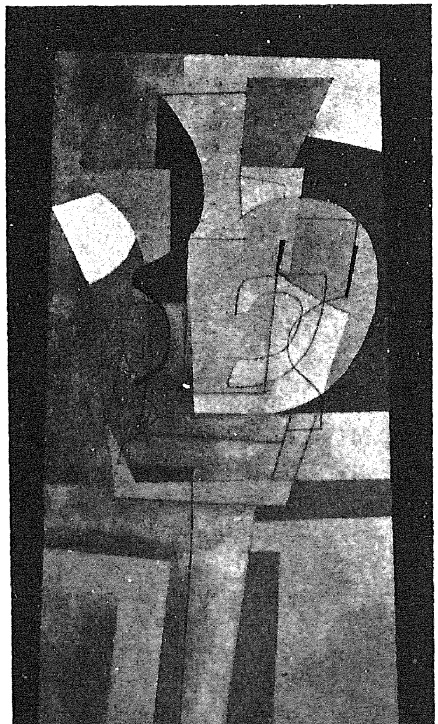
Back at the Tate again, one reflected that Matisse the sculptor is as lucid, economical, calm and strong as Matisse the painter. He is always voluptuous yet austere; sensuous yet intellectual. In a word, he *contains*

within himself most of the opposing forces to which an artist is always susceptible. Few triumph at the expense of others; this is what makes him a classical artist. Whoever belittles Matisse's sculpture is probably attacking his Latin orientation as a whole, rather than his formal sensibility; for those modelled female heads and figurines reveal a sureness of form and a plastic knowledge which is extraordinarily complete and deceptively simple. Here are no painter's silhouettes solidified, merely, into three dimensions. Here are fruit-like, gourd-like, bud-like forms composed and realized in the round, until the analogy with the female figure is complete. In his knobbly, chunky bronzes, no less than in his paintings, Matisse extols *growth*, but the growth of flesh, not bone. Everything under the sun should grow straight and strong, firm and luscious. The female body, in both his sculpture and his painting, is conveyed in terms of a taut and limber rococo—for such are the rhythms of growth. But it is a modern rococo, lithe in its curves and apparently loose in the balanced order of its design. It is never floury, heavy or brittle. In an age largely dominated by the geometric and the rigid, its creation has been a remarkable achievement.

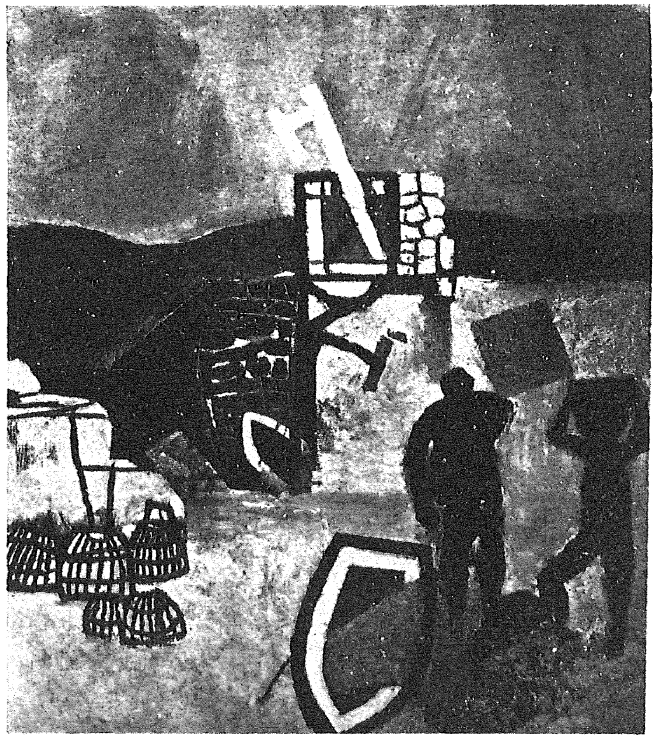
Criticism of Matisse's sculpture is, therefore, impossible from the point of view from which we so frequently criticize sculpture at present; its possession—or lack—of plastic coherence, of form that is so broad and strong that it exists three-dimensionally. Matisse has these qualities in good measure. What, then, denies the final bite of greatness to his sculpture? Why would I prefer a drawing or a painting from his hand? I think it is that his figures lack presence. In his painting it never matters one jot when his beautiful girl has a distinctly anonymous air. Her impersonalness is part of her charm: and if his tables, chairs and jugs of flowers all have a blurred identity as separate objects, that is because the artist's main preoccupation is not the enhancement of individual objects (Braque, with his '*L'objet, c'est tout!*', does *that*), but the communication of the whole scene, the whole setting, in terms of light (and light, in painting, is colour). In sculpture this dilution of the personality of an object (and in Matisse's sculpture 'the object' is a woman) is unfortunate. It removes that potent core of mysterious individuality which the greatest sculpture possesses; which, indeed, it exists to transmit. Matisse is a very great painter. But he is probably no more than a very excellent sculptor.

I asked: Fruit or Thorn? I do not really want either, of course. Ripeness is transitory: fruit moves through it into another state, not

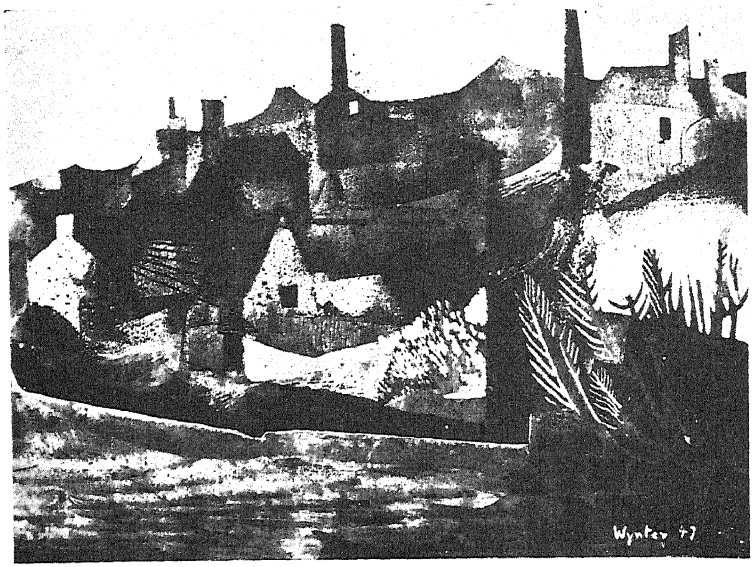
so desirable. Sculpture which aims only to capture and arrest the full contours of ripeness lacks structure. Bone is under the curves of flesh. But if we have bone only we suspire in a desert—again we are denied the supreme expression, the widest embodiment of complementaries. We needs must have Fruit *and* Thorn. For me this is most perfectly achieved (in modern sculpture) in the works of Henry Moore: his square-round, hard-soft rhythm presents us with a superlative amalgam of the organic and the geometric, the aesthetic and the human.



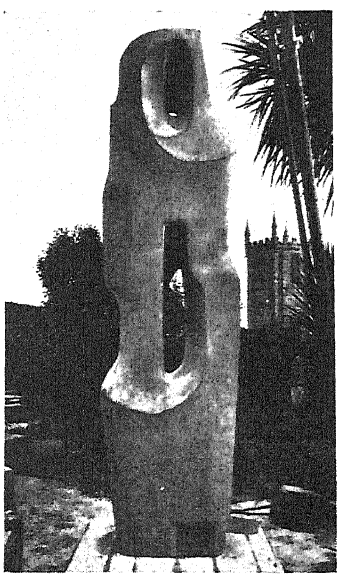
31
Ben Nicholson: February 12 1952 (Carafe)



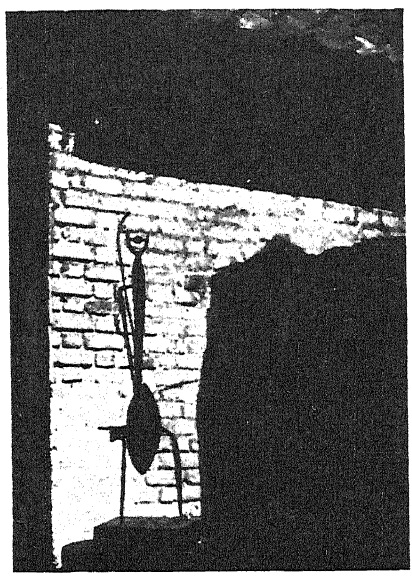
32
Keith Vaughan: Finisterre: Seaweed Hoist, 1951



33 Bryan Wynter: Estuary Landscape, 1947



34 Barbara Hepworth: Monolith (empyrean), 1953.
(Blue corrib limestone: height, 8 ft. 9 in.)



35 Reg Butler: Woman, 1949.
(Forged iron: height, 12 in. study for large figure.)

15

TWENTY-FIVE FRAGMENTS

Cézanne's Watercolours

CÉZANNE'S watercolours have given new status to their medium. Previously identifiable as the more tentative, slighter mode of expression, watercolour entered a new phase with Cézanne, who made with it something as final and absolute as his own oils; something at once monumental and utterly delicate; aerially immense and supremely indicative of volume and sculptured form, yet intimate, sweet and clear, as all that does no violence to a paper host must be. Cézanne's watercolours are, in short, no substitute: *sketch* or *impression* would be words of little accuracy. It may be said, of course, that the wonderful smudges of Rembrandt's pen and wash drawings are complete, and completely valuable; and it is so. But degrees of structural precision, and therefore of articulation, are gained by the Cézannes, which no more retire behind a halo of *suggestion* than does, say, a tempera by Michelangelo.

If white paper would seem to confound these remarks, I must point out how *used* are the white areas which lie scattered thick as archepelagoes across these pictures. I would almost say that in them the expression is at its most intense; that it is precisely the white patches that are most potent in form, almost bulging from the surface with the movement and light which is concentrated in them. The flakes of colour which alight in definition *round* the forms contemplated, overlap one another with rainbow richness, stating and re-stating contours and planes in the unending attempt to capture the essential aspect, the heart of form. White is where he dared not tread: the vital node of every form, where false statement would destroy the whole. White is

the unstateable core of each coloured snowstorm of definitions; and its potency derives from the fact that every slanting stroke at the perimeter throws definition inwards, adds meaning to the white! There is a sense in which each coloured stab on the snowy paper only defines a doubt—one more doubt. But really doubt and certainty lie side by side in every gesture of the brush; for Cézanne's humility before sensation and his overwhelming conviction in the experience of that sensation are both present, and obvious, in every picture he ever painted. Hesitation—conviction: hesitation—statement: he maintained and endured the tension like a saint, never yielding to the temptation to produce synthetic unity, to work the picture together on a level other than that of his peculiar conviction. Probably he regarded the white bits as failures, unfinished: for his eye was fixed far beyond even his achievement and nothing satisfied him: he habitually referred to his finest works as 'studies' which, he trusted, 'were improving a little'.

But, if Cézanne was the saint of modern painting, and if his painting has seemed abstract, and saturated with a metaphysic, by comparison with his finest contemporary, Renoir, for instance, we may recover a more human feeling for him again simply by continuing to look at his pictures. The elevation, the spiritual intensity is there, in the angular and bony emphasis, but—so is the kitchen table and the milk-can and the teaspoons or the cup-hung dresser. We only get from painting what we are immediately qualified by the current state of our mind and senses (our aesthetic perceptiveness) to receive. I have long known Cézanne's austerity: what attacked me lately was the great tenderness of feeling: the brilliant early foliage of the curving lane: the purple-gold light of afternoon on the mountain: the green winking of a bottle amongst the minor suns of yellow-red apples: the blue and white dazzle of morning light in the trees. So much for the theorists' abolition of 'the subject'! As I have pointed out before, the *significant form* of an apple derives at least as great a part of its significance from its connection with that apple as from the fact that it exists in the category of 'form'. Picasso was nearer the mark than most critics when he said: 'There is no abstract art. You must always begin with something.'

Rome, April 1953

In Rome the past overpowers the present with overwhelming finality. Only the motor scooters, the cars, the women's suits, shoes

and handbags, and the countless new shops are modern. And these are all exquisite in design and workmanship: these alone of the city's contemporary products are capable of opposing, with their perky, streamlined vitality, the massive formal grandeur of the past. And of course it is no opposition but, rather, a deep accord that links these buzzing, glittering things to their ancient setting, where layer upon layer of architectural formalization stands, encrusted not by the deposits of age and weather but only by further additions from the hand of man. The formal genius in the touch of its artisans links this city's past and present. The black-and-white gloves of the women; their ochre shoes; the elegant, reticent lettering on the nameplates at the entrances to flats, ancient or modern—all connects at once with the uneven spacing of windows in the (at first) empty flatnesses of the façade of the Palazzo Venezia, or the white marble star inlaid in the pavement of the Campidoglio.

Because of all this it at first seemed strange that there should turn out to be so few painters in Rome, and precious few *avant-garde* galleries. Yet the fact is the modern painter cannot breathe in the shadow of the austere, dry, bare, immense, brown, ancient palaces—and of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. An extremely diminutive exhibition of paintings by Afro, at the tiny Galleria del Obelisco in Via Sistina, was the only interesting modern Italian painting that I saw on a recent visit to this capital city of the giant dead.

Rouault's Guerre *and* Miserère *Aquatints*

The bulging whites and contracting blacks of Rouault's prints have usurped the functions of colour. We realize that his is, essentially, a black-and-white vision. Its forms are created by encircling all convex surfaces in his figures—the whites—with immensely thick black lines, so thick as not to be 'lines' at all, for the definition of the many receding or 'vanishing' planes is concentrated into a single iron bar of blackness. With the apparent ease of a herculean blacksmith these bars of definition are made to twist and writhe until a form is born and a ghostly face looks out. But this birth is the result of the marriage of pure white and pure black: half-tones are, like colour in his paintings, an afterthought, an enriching detail which the structure can happily be

made to carry. In his paintings one savours his reds and greens for their redness or greenness, forgetting for a moment what niche they occupy in the structure they adorn: yet, like figures on a cathedral façade, which, though inviting a separate scrutiny, remain consistent supports of the architectural whole, the jewel quality of Rouault's *patches* of colour never detracts from the pre-defined unity.

Apart from his genius for resolving form into these islands of white defined by channels or pools of black, Rouault is a painter of the severest limitations. If we have thoroughly absorbed the miraculous interplay of the white and black shapes and are looking for the next kind of formal relation, the interaction of a *whole* form such as a head or figure with other whole units, we are about to be disappointed. The relation in space of one figure to another, or to a house, or a landscape, is so simple as to be naïve, almost crude. Rouault would seem, almost always, to have spent himself by the time he comes to the problem of relating his magnificently fractured, dissected yet re-organized persons either to their immediate setting or to one another. Similarly, he is happiest where only a head, or a head and shoulders, or a head and shoulders and trunk (but not the *whole* figure) is there in the picture to worry him. Where he cannot avoid landscape he reduces it either to a backcloth—note the old trick of a single street vanishing into the distance with houses of accentuated perspective—or to a single vast plain; which is, of course, a single vast plane, too! And where he must draw a whole man, right out to his fingers and toes, he is much less inventive than where he has simply the hulk of a torso or bust or head to go at. Hands and feet become mere gestures in this direction or that: hands, particularly, are a cliché with Rouault—a row of parallel fingers straight from the Middle Ages, little better than Eric Gill's woodcuts. Think of hands, *and* feet, in any drawing of Picasso: they are portraits in themselves.

But it is when Rouault has to group three or more (*whole*) people that he is at his poorest in these aquatints, for then he is merely evoking puppets with matchstick arms and legs bending only at elbows and knees. I know that *texture* never fails: but texture can be merely decorative. And I recognize that the very elementary spatial relation of some of the figures is intentional, that it simplifies the arrangement until it is almost in terms of bas-relief; a sort of medallion imagery. This last quality is present in them all, and it is a magnificent quality. But nothing can redeem such commonplace groups of figures as he sometimes heaps into the foreground of a townscape: then, even the

familiar symbolic belfry and some dramatic spurts of flame and smoke do not atone for the foreground of . . . reclining meringues. . . .

Artists in Cornwall

West Penwith is the name of the final, most westerly knob of Cornwall: it is connected to England by the four-and-a-half-mile neck of low land between St. Ives' Bay and Mount's Bay: between Lelant Water and Marazion, to be precise. From the higher ground of this great wind-blown headland where trees grow almost horizontally away from the north-west gales, and even the lichen-grey rocks emerge in horizontal layers to stress the horizons of surrounding ocean, the natives have to look east-north-east, 'up England way', for their only land-bound view. For at least two generations West Penwith has swarmed with easels and canvases. On the quays of its grey stone villages the fishermen have scarcely been more numerous than 'they hartists', if a little more vigorous in welcoming new techniques: the brown sails are less in evidence on the boats than in the pictures. The late-Victorian worshippers of red sails in the sunset, no less than the pseudo-Impressionists who survive to this day, were attracted by the irregular roofs and the intricate contours of St. Ives, Newlyn and Mousehole, for the simple reason that these things were found to arrange themselves into 'compositions', wherever one cast an eye. A certain 'aesthetic'—if the word will tolerate inverted commas for a moment—had found *its ideal locus*; also its adjective—*picturesque*. (Turner, Whistler, Sickert: all paid their visits.)

This is all very annoying, because these places are genuinely exciting and deserve a better fate. Undoubtedly an emotional predisposition to resistance is generated in sensitive newcomers by the products of this local industry. In passing, it is worth noting that the wind-blown, Celtic-rocks-and-gorse aspect has entirely escaped the attentions of the old school: its recent discovery by a very different kind of artist (Bryan Wynter, Peter Lanyon, John Wells or W. Barns-Graham, for instance) was thus unopposed by ghosts of more sentimental versions. The harbours and fishing-villages have not been entirely denied a genuine interpretation, but until very recent times we have had one artist alone to thank for it, the late Christopher Wood. And Wood was not without a debt: with Ben Nicholson he shares a

considerable one to an unlettered native of St. Ives (where Nicholson, Hepworth and Lanyon live), the extraordinary Alfred Wallis, who died a pauper at over seventy during the war, and who may justly be regarded as the British counterpart of the Douanier Rousseau. Every bit as 'primitive' (in the sense of being an isolated artistic phenomenon, incapable of receiving influence from anyone, past or present), Wallis made pictures which are less involved in their design or 'finished' in their texture than Rousseau's. But Rousseau's finish was commonplace, his vision a sentimental suburban clerk's daydream: Wallis, fisherman and rag-and-bone merchant, was a much more interesting artist: the reality of the sea's white menace to the huddled dark-green headlands, and of the matchwood boats that did not always cheat it, was his imaginative and his actual world in one. His images have a profounder source than Rousseau's; their content is far more urgent and mysterious; and, strangest of all, their design and the texture of their paint has far more to say to us to-day: both Wood and Nicholson were particularly excited by this latter aspect of Wallis's work. Are these scandalous views of mine wholly derived from the undeniable fact that I would never elect to spend a Sunday afternoon paying a visit to the Palm House at Kew if I could, instead, walk over from St. Ives to Zennor, where I lived at the age of seven?

To an American Painter

The problem for you American artists is a very different one from ours in England. You cannot escape the necessity of studying the French any more than we can. But whereas we are looking for a new *formal* energy to match our ancient resources of poetry, you have not only to import techniques; you have to find your poetry too. The American scene has not yet revealed itself through a visual imagination: instead, a European-bred vision has been imposed, laid down across American reality, which itself still remains unseen. I am generalizing, of course, and it may be pointed out that American art has been exceedingly varied in its manifestations: no development in Europe but has had its echo in American practice. This is true. But diversity of form and content in the extent and to the degree we now witness is a sign of weakness rather than strength in modern Western art. Even in France, where oppositions of style are most real, they are not them-

selves a reassuring feature. One cannot help feeling that, were the chasm separating Bonnard from Picasso rather smaller, there would be better grounds for hoping for a successor for either of them. The diversity in American art, however, strikes me as being less authentic than in French. The divergent approaches of American artists seem in each case to reflect something more like a conscious choice at the level of style than an inevitable compulsion at a deeper level—the less articulate level of spiritual necessity. There is somehow the suggestion, with much American art, that the artist has begun at the level on which one is conscious of technique; that he starts with a decision about the precise aesthetic character of his work and is thereafter compelled to attempt to 'fill out' a predefined pattern with evidence of the feeling which should have determined that pattern. It might be said that the modern world induces, in artists, the wrong sort of consciousness: certainly, in the absence of the semi-conscious guidance which the French or English receive from tradition the American is exposed to a wider range of conscious choice and decision. Thus, whether he chooses to derive his style from Cubism, Expressionism, Surrealism or Constructivism, his work cannot avoid the suggestion that it is predominantly cerebral in origin. This seems its overriding characteristic.

But I cannot see how it could as yet be otherwise. Not only technical devices but the principles of feeling which govern the choice and arrangement of subject-matter have had to be borrowed from another continent. Torn from their context in Europe, these things become mere formulae. Now in art, formula is always present, but it is subject to continual change under pressure from experience. And the experience of the present feeds upon the experience of the past, upon that which lies crystallized in the works of the past. The modern artist, however, is shut off from the past to the extent to which he is unfamiliar with its subject-matter: that is, to the extent to which he does not come across that subject-matter in reality. I cannot 'make use of Cézanne' in my own work if his subjects and my subjects do not overlap very considerably. Hence the immense importance in painting of physical environment, of place. Again and again the greatest painters of an age are found concentrated into the smallest areas—a particular city; a certain stretch of coast; a single country. The same light; the same landscape; the same kind of interiors with the same kind of furniture, from wallpaper to the common carafe and the long loaves; these provide the imagination of a French painter with a constant world. If art is to be renewed from generation to generation, a probable

condition is the inheritance by the younger of a great deal of the actual subject-matter of the elder: not only the same landscape but the same human furniture, evolved by the same culture. Even so, a new vision must be forged: and to see the utterly familiar with new eyes is a hard enough task for anyone. (It is worth noting that the real revolutionaries in modern painting are those painters for whom the commonplace object—coffee-pot, lemon, jugs of flowers—suffices.) But for the painter who finds himself (like all Americans) in a landscape where nothing he looks at has ever been looked at before him by the eyes of a great painter, the task is superhuman. Like the South Africans, the Australians and Canadians, you need a genius whose sense of European art, past and present, is capable of white-hot fusion with his sense of America's visual reality.

Is the fact that American non-figurative painting has become a movement of immense proportions possibly a sign that this problem is insoluble at present?

Frances Hodgkins

To over-praise an artist, by even the slightest margin, is to unbar the door to his detractors. I count myself an admirer of the late Frances Hodgkins and I am anxious, therefore, merely to neutralize—rather than take advantage of—the recent exaggeration of a critic in claiming that her work 'equals in quality that of her great contemporaries in France'. Undoubtedly Frances Hodgkins was in certain respects an inspired artist: she had the power to create images which were remarkably original, whether regarded in themselves or as equivalents for natural objects. A farmyard implement or machine, no less than a jug, would be translated into an unforgettable image: the true creative process by which the subjects of painting are recreated, rather than reported, was always present in her work. She could not copy. A further distinction, and it is rare, was her ability to extend this creative insight to landscape: many modern artists suffer a restriction of vision that is apparently typical of our time—their insight fails with the broad open-air scene.

The few landscapists among the moderns tend, even so, to evoke their hills and valleys by way of still life. Sutherland has always expelled the natural atmosphere; there is no trace in his landscapes of

the blues which alone suggest air, distance, and the scale of the outdoor scene. Sutherland's hills might be models of hills, preserved in a vacuum, the air pumped out; equally, they might be the size of a whole continent seen from an altitude of 10,000 miles. Size, actual scale, do not matter: his hills are microcosmic or macrocosmic, according to your feeling of the moment: they work as analogies of form whether you read them as referring to Everest or an ash-heap. In this resides their chief fascination. Frances Hodgkins, however, was interested every time in the actual instance: the specific subject. Her farmhouse or her row of tall, tapering elms are not generalizations, such as Sutherland makes: she is concerned with one scene, the place she is in. No matter how abstract her rendering becomes, she is still communicating a formal fantasy based on this view of this farm: or of that table by that window in that room. In other words, abstraction in her painting, so far from being an end in itself, comes into existence simply as a vehicle: it is always at the service of a specific object. And this is, of course, precisely as it should be. A painter who begins by admiring—not this or that thing, place or person—but the essence of abstraction itself, is likely to end in an arid desert of de-spiritualized forms. The visual music of purely formal relationships may well be the profoundest experience which painting can offer. Nevertheless, what is abstract and formal in painting cannot be self-supporting. We must continually forge our abstractions anew—and the material to be used is the natural imagery of the visual world, on one hand, and the imagery of the greatest painters (of any age) on the other. These two, fused, ignite the creative spark: this way new forms arise.

Frances Hodgkins cannot be classed with 'her great contemporaries in France' because of her inability to absorb enough from the second of these two sources of inspiration. Her originality when confronted by nature was not matched by a sufficiently profound understanding of pictorial science. Where Braque, Picasso or Matisse, incredible though they are for the diversity of their work, still speak the language of the central tradition, Frances Hodgkins is brilliantly talented, naïve, an outsider to that tradition. Though she possessed a visual imagination so intense as to amount to genius, she was incapable of expanding her vivid clusters of imagery into a coherent pictorial whole. Her sense of the whole, of the unity of construction, tended to be restricted to what was often little more than a consistent texture; a net of pleasant, misty colour thrown over the whole surface to unify it. Such connection as this device affords is not a proper equivalent for a set of more structural

relations. This is why we feel that the cottage with a tree at its corner, the farm-cart with a milk-churn which stands by a broken gate, the tin shed with a farm machine of some sort leaning against it, are all too isolated and floating. All her images of solid objects are too self-contained; they are like birds' nests floating on a stream: the surface of the water is a neutral, passive background to these little islands of interest. . . . Even so, I think she was probably the best woman painter ever to work permanently in England (she was born in New Zealand).

Alan Davie

Alan Davie is a young Scottish painter of great quality. He must paint in a deep but active trance, mesmerized by the streaking, flying, dripping pigment his somnambulistic hand so sensitively, nervously and passionately registers upon the canvas. Here, with a wealth of textural refinement, elaboration and pure physical richness, is the poetry of pigment, the phantasy of paint itself. And it is a Celtic phantasy, full of hollow atmosphere, shadow-laden mist, the glisten—not of gristle: here is no fashionable surrealist—but of dewdrops, melting frost or clear well-water. So much for Davie's texture, with its proclamation of mastery of medium. The structure of his composition is harder to define. The link with visual reality—what the eye may anywhere see—is tenuous, certainly. Springing lines of drawing (concealed no more and no less by the dense atmosphere of filmy pigment which clings about them, than are the masts, spars or rails to which fishing-nets cling when they hang drying over them) suggest forms of growth; or garden arabesques like the limbs of large plants. Yet although the main passion is in the storms of pigment, these are not mechanically canalized into such boring and regular irregularities as we see in Jackson Pollock's followers. Into the atmospheric swirl of a canvas by Alan Davie we may penetrate deep into space—precisely as we may escape, *through* steamy clouds of pigment, out into the vast voids of sea and snowstorm in Turner's later works.

James Cant in London

I first became acquainted with the painting of James Cant round about 1950. At that time he had returned from Australia with pictures of two kinds: there were interiors in which girls or young women were to be seen, seated or standing, against the blue rectangle of a window filled with Australian sky; and there were formalized landscapes in which, perhaps, a frieze of interlocking sandhills formed the backcloth to a brown stage with a sole actor upon it—some strange bird or reptile—while the whole scene was dominated by a strange-coloured disc in the sky, a variant of planet or satellite. In the first category, the girls' limbs were as rounded, plastic and soft as the chairs and window-frames were sharp and brittle. To describe them in terms of other painters' figures of women or girls, one might say that they combined the weighty, rotund modelling of Derain with the flat, heraldic gesticulations of Campigli's puppet-women. Then, in the landscapes, there was that absence of plasticity in the form, that airlessness and that almost ideographic flatness of image, which one associates with Paul Klee. Altogether these two groupings of pictures by Cant appeared to contain, therefore, a number of apparently irreconcilable trends. However, there were in fact certain constant qualities: in design they were all effectively broad; their colour was always luminous though flat; and in touch they were all unfailingly sensitive.

I think this quality of touch—of a touch that can both assist the definition of rotund or architectural forms, on the one hand, and bring to life flat areas of paint on the other—is possibly the main vehicle of continuity in the changes of style which James Cant, an Australian painter, has experienced during his present sojourn in this country, in London. Gone are the bright blues, pinks and yellows of his Australian pictures: London has imposed a more sombre palette. And in getting to grips with the sad poetry of the metropolis Cant has also been led to abandon, in increasing measure, the summary, effective, well-balanced, simplified design of his earlier works in favour of a less emphatic and subtler configuration. London is in many ways a ragged city, dominated by no great formal themes of architectural order. Its spatial geometry is inhibited, half-hearted. Hardly anywhere in London does the forceful logic of architecture impose itself successfully: rather, the straight lines bend, the angles soften, the façades crumble into

inconsistency and the vistas are denied. For this reason a rendering of the London scene that is based upon the crisp formal logic of Cubism rings false. James Cant has realized all this. His buildings confront one another asymmetrically and along lines that are not quite parallel: and they have the mellow softness of London buildings, slightly reminiscent of marzipan. Possibly this aspect of London is chiefly fascinating to those who arrive from the Antipodes. Anyway, James Cant—the most interesting Australian painter of whom I know—has discovered this London and presented it in sensitive paint.

Massimo Campigli

Something ancient from pre-Christian Italy, and containing Pompeian and Greco-Roman as well as Byzantine elements, is the force which drives this contemporary from Milan to create a flattened imagery of doll-like female figures. Dry biscuit-colours, ochres, off-whites, cool browns and whitish powdery blues are rendered with the mattest of surfaces, dried up and even cracked here and there: pictures painted last year or this have already an almost timeless texture. Yet they belong unmistakably to the present moment: the very simplicity and near-symmetry of their images as well, of course, as their design, and their handling (a dry blunt brush gives Campigli his characteristic touch), proclaim the modern genesis of these interesting paintings. Sitting in twos on sofas, or at a piano—or grouped, three or four, in a sort of white-walled yard—Campigli's doll-women have waists like a flattened diabolo, neat breasts and spherical heads. Furthermore, they are invariably seen full face or profile: but perhaps the more subtle half-positions cannot be stated with this degree of formalization by a lesser genius than Picasso. The space created for the setting of these figures is shallow: as in Giotto there is the feeling of a wall running just behind the figures and parallel to the picture surface. Sometimes a panelled wall is actually depicted: but always this flattened world of the ancient fresco is Campigli's special terrain. Perhaps two things in particular contribute to the success of his works, making us feel that we are in the presence of a good and unusual artist. First there is complete conviction: this curious subject-matter is no pedantic, surrealist revival of period atmosphere and detail—indeed, for Campigli it is all quite natural: this is obvious. And secondly, Campigli is a very good craftsman; there is a workmanlike calm about him. He only attempts that

which he can accomplish. By limiting ambition, he breeds his own confidence in himself.

A Paradox of Criticism

It has always been my belief that the least important part of criticism is the verdict: *good*: *bad*: or something in between. Anyone can say these short words: and almost anyone can 'sum up', in a smart epigrammatic form, the exhibited work of a painter or sculptor. Criticism should sacrifice pleasantries of style for a ploddingly careful analysis of what is there on the canvases under review. Criticism should have more in common with science than with poetry, for it is the subject you are discussing that is important and not the thing you write about it. I will even go so far as to suggest that the critic should try to purify his writing of any sort of verbal felicities which might deflect attention from the work under discussion by attracting it to itself. Eliot's 'The word neither diffident nor ostentatious' says something of what I mean. But above all, the catchy phrase is to be avoided, because it interposes a vivid verbal thought between the spectator and the painting. It is worse than useless: it impairs the spectator's receptiveness *to paint*. And when all this has been consistently attempted . . . the personal voice of the critic will perhaps gain a more than personal meaning: the dry prose may—who knows?—take on the significance of poetry.

Apropos of Sickert, Keene and Cézanne

In art, as in life, no experience is ever repeated. In one respect or another, we face the unknown in every instant. There is therefore no possibility of the practice of 'safety first' in art: indeed, the act of art may well be regarded as nothing less than an apprehension of the Future—an intimation of what might be, but as yet is not. If art cannot make this vital leap against the unknown; if it can't brace itself to express the inexpressible; to articulate whatever is inarticulate; to give material form to that which exists in the imagination alone—if art cannot do these things, it is not art at all. It is only something which the dead forms of the Past have claimed, even before it is born. Something called Academic Art.

When we look at Keene's drawings we may think for a moment that he was an artist of this kind—an academic artist. But of course he was not really anything of the sort—and we have only to use our eyes to discover the fact. Nearly all Keene's drawings were made between 1850 and 1891: that is to say, early enough to have influenced Monet, Pissarro and Sisley, before the Impressionist vision had crystallized. But we do not have to view them historically in order to react to Keene's drawings ourselves. Like all good art, they speak for themselves—and in a language of their own. Sickert tells us that Keene's influence on the great French Impressionists was greater than Constable's—and it is conceivable that it might have been. Here indeed was black-and-white drawing registering light and shadow, mass and contour, air and (as Tonks and Steer suggested) colour itself, even. Here in Victorian England was a pen-and-ink Impressionism preceding the great French movement.

If we want a reason for the comparative neglect of Keene's work in recent years, it is simply this: a series of developments of the most revolutionary significance have obtruded between Keene and ourselves. Keene died in 1891. In that year Cézanne was 52 and Picasso was 10—a couple of facts which surely need no comment. To my generation, then, it is inevitable that Keene should be seen through Sickert; I often have to remind myself that it was Keene who influenced Sickert, and not the other way about. In most respects, though, Keene is perhaps inferior to Sickert. He had little of Sickert's power to reconstruct a scene: little of Sickert's brilliant *visual wit*—by which I mean his capacity to take a snapshot view of things from an unusual angle. Sickert's visual wit is distinct from his literary wit. It is this visual wit that causes him to make the back of a chair loom terrific in the foreground of a conversation piece: it is this visual wit which seizes on the curving underside of the gallery, as seen from the stalls, and make of it a key shape in a painting of the interior of a theatre. Sickert's superiority springs also from his wider experience of the paint itself, and of colour; but it comes, too, as I've suggested, from a greater ability in the realm of design. With a born painter like Sickert the faculty of design means an ability to organize in terms of solid form: a true painter designs in three dimensions; the design he creates is figured in terms of space. Now this is where Keene shows certain limitations: he didn't so much *compose* as record or register. He was a simple fellow in many ways, and his attitude, as revealed in his drawing, is extremely open; extremely receptive, and frank. That is to

say, Keene accepted what he could actually see, and little else. This visual evidence which Nature presented to his eye, this was by far the most important thing for him: his was really an art, not of illustration at all, but of *observation*. The observation of light upon solid things—this is Keene's great and most original contribution; and it is this of course that links him to Sickert and the Impressionists. Indeed, I think I would say Keene was superior to Sickert in one thing only: *his sheer visual awareness was more acute*. Also, the touch by which he registered whatever he saw was, if not more accurate, at any rate more tense: and of course he could charge a *single* line with greater descriptive meaning than Sickert.

But Sickert and Keene are very similar in two things. They can both evoke mass and volume, light and air, by means of a varied scribble and cross-hatching. They both tend to describe forms beginning at the centre of their mass, and by means of this atmospheric scribble: they tend, too, to dispense with outlines of any length or consistency. But this way of seeing was Keene's discovery: Sickert's successful adoption of it shows up, by comparison, a more able and resourceful nature.

The other thing they have in common is what I would call a *camera-eye*. They believed in photographic correctness in the sense that they tried to *record*—and to record with mechanical truth—the exact position of each object in the field of vision as well as its exact dimensions. The light and shadow which render any object visible must be registered; and registered exactly as though the artist's retina were the lens of a camera. The illusion of solid reality was to be evoked by this almost mechanical reproduction of actual physical vision: the eye was trained to receive, without comment, as it were, the actual accents of light and dark, precisely as they occur in the visual field. This was 'slavery to appearances' all right: and yet there was no *imitation*, either of the details or the texture of things. But Sickert and Keene did behave like photo-sensitized plates in that they registered the lights and darks of the visual field without interpreting them. They didn't risk distorting the photographic tones by feeling the forms which underlie appearances: they simply captured the appearances as such.

You may say that all this is the theory of Impressionism: and so it is. But Monet, Sisley and Pissarro proceeded from something more subtle than theory: Impressionism was, above all, *sensation*: theory is always imposed in retrospect. Monet's painting abounds in emotion and observation that is unique to Monet—Monet the marvellous artist. But Sickert is different: Sickert is definitely too restricted by his theories

and his knowledge. He seems to have believed too consciously in his own good drawing, for instance. Let us just think of his contemporary Pierre Bonnard: Bonnard was a greater because a more instinctive painter than Sickert. Perhaps he didn't ever think in the terms I am using: but Bonnard did follow Cézanne in one thing—his paintings, like Cézanne's, contain more than one system of perspective, and this means that he possessed a more intuitive approach to sensation. It is after all unnatural for human eyes to behave like a camera. A camera sees everything according to the single, static perspective of a single static eye, or lens. But the human eyes dart in and out of the complex forms of reality. Each slight movement of our eyes creates a new perspective for the whole scene before us. When Cézanne's eye rested on an apple, there was a single perspective with that apple at its centre: but when he suddenly looked past the apple to the handle of a milk jug, an entirely new scheme of perspective immediately existed for him, with the handle at its centre. Then suddenly Cézanne's eye would move again, and perhaps he'd look through between the handle and the jug itself, through to the wall behind; again the whole field of vision would reel and change and reassemble, centred upon the distant moulding of the dado.

An infinite number of points of focus exist, even in a simple still-life arrangement. One's eye may settle at any point; but every point of focus involves a new configuration of everything in sight, of every object within the visual field. Cézanne strove to reconcile as many of these conflicting viewpoints as possible in every single canvas. Bonnard, too, was sensitive to the heaving thrusts and movement which the moving eye bestows upon the static world. But Sickert imposed too simple an idea, too single a perspective, upon the infinite subtlety and richness of reality.

I could put it another way: I could say what Sickert lacked was the power of empathy. By this I mean that he never expresses anything about an object that he hasn't come to know by looking at it with his eyes. It *is* possible in painting to express the feelings we have for certain forms—say a peach or a woman's arm—it's possible to express the knowledge and sensations which we have gained by touch, taste and smell. Certainly, the best painters have always expressed these non-visual, or rather, these extra-visual qualities. But Sickert thought his work was done when he'd found an equivalent for a face in a slab of gritty pink or green, placed next to a patch of lilac-grey, or dark matt brown. He goes no further than this in exploring the texture of the

face. He remains aloof from the face as a face: he is intent solely upon its visual meaning, its visual quality in terms of colour and tone. He cannot explore the inner plastic character of things because that would mean abandoning the purely visual approach. But when I call Sickert 'detached' and 'aloof' I'm not forgetting that, from a literary point of view, he was anything but detached. Sickert's artistic personality was never perfectly integrated: what he lost in the way of passion by the cold and exclusively visual character of his painter's vision he tried to make up for in his choice of subjects. But the 'rollicking fun', or the rather acid gaiety, of the scenes he drew and painted is something divorced from the actual painting itself. Humour and wit, one feels, were injected separately into compositions which were, as pure pictorial expression, all too dry. Although he stood head and shoulders above all the English painters of his generation, and provided England at the time with her only example of an artist of Continental stature, there was something too professional, too obviously accomplished about Sickert. One wishes he'd had a little more of the pictorial innocence of a Bonnard.

Matthew Smith—English Fauve

– 1947 –

At Tooth's we find that what Fry referred to as the plastic colour of Matthew Smith operates upon us as powerfully as ever. Further, we are shown once again that, for a truly contemplative eye, apples and pears and the other commonplaces of 'the still-life arrangement' (jugs and a clay figure) will always suffice: nor is there the fear of such things dating, if the quality of vision is such as Sir Matthew bestows. But if his impulsive brush used sometimes to register the single object too summarily, too much in terms dictated by a rapid apprehension of the whole subject so that the same scribble of colour that evokes the pear also to some extent suppresses it, obscuring as well as creating its form, that is increasingly a feature of the past. Matthew Smith's still-life series at Tooth's have a gigantic calm and clarity. His objects no longer lurch into one another, or sway in a crowd towards a corner of the canvas, blown by the gale of the painter's passion. Each stands free of its neighbour; fully created, in space; yet detached, aloof and refined to the point of being almost a symbol of itself. For example, *Still Life*

with Pears and Jug has a flat scribble of amber colour bounded by a single, thickish brushline of softened alizarine crimson for the jug: this superbly simple shape, flat in itself but not in its operation, is almost Braque-like in its heraldic grandeur.

But what happens in the portraits? His deep desire to resolve the chaotic rush of evidence brought in by the eye and to organize it into a pattern involving semi-abstract components—he was a Fauve but never an Impressionist: composition for him was always an affair of *definite* forms, the rotund predominating—all this is partly frustrated in the portraits. In the faces Matthew Smith descends to a point which is the nearest he ever gets to being naturalistic: he lacks Matisse's intellectual power and cannot reduce face and figure to the economical terms of his own best design. On the other hand, he cannot rid himself of the linear to the extent of forcing a harder and clearer form, built plastically; for this would involve the tonal modulation he has so rarely attempted, as well, perhaps, as a resort to differentiated planes—another kind of expression he has never bothered much about.

The landscapes also are in a category slightly apart. *Provençal Landscape, I*, is in the older manner, the writhing brushwork perfectly discharging its plastic duties—for we are aware only of the quiet fullness of the hillside's contour, the tree's mass. In the near slope, under an olive tree which is the work of Sir Matthew's thumb, I think, the sweetness and delicacy of the caressing strokes—a feathery seductiveness which is nonetheless sure in its definition of the receding ground—remind us, despite the heavier, more regular touch, of Renoir; but the Renoir of the small rapid sketches. We might notice that Matthew Smith's idiom precludes all detailed comment: what the fat, volume-evoking swirls leave unsaid cannot be added; the afterthought of a leaf or two on a bush, or an extra accent of drawing, these are impossible. Such detail must be supplied by the spectator (as it would have to be with Cézanne, but not with Renoir). As for the drawing, the drawing is all in the paint and the paint is all colour. There is no paint here which is not drawing; and none which is not operative colour. What other definitions has fine painting?

– 1953 –

Matthew Smith at his best is a painter of great authority. Easily the most important English painter of his generation, he rivals the older Sickert in the truly professional nature of his attack—by which I mean that he possesses in a high degree the ability to draw, compose and

execute his pictures with such breadth and apparent ease of handling that that most typical of English failings, a lack of rhythm and a tight meanness of form, is always absent from his pictures. And there are other respects in which he is more French than English: he understands, as few other English painters living do, the true potentialities of colour, which he is able to use at once with scientific accuracy and an exciting emotional effect. That is to say, the green plane filling the thick, sensuous and oily outline of one of his apples in a still life does two things simultaneously: it places that apple in space (and, of course, evokes its form, its peculiar variant upon a sphere, at the same time), and it strikes a sonorous emotive note—*green!* Colour always has, broadly speaking, these two functions; the first, a descriptive, accurate, informative one, telling us about the structure, placing and 'spacing' of the subject: the second, speaking straight to the emotions. Some painters understand the first, the intellectual, rôle of colour well enough, but leave us with no poetry of colour, no colour-emotion. Yet others confer the rich clash and vibration of sumptuously emotive yellows, reds, greens in full strength upon their works while leaving such colour no descriptive or defining work to do. The first are the anaemic intellectuals of painting: the second are the undisciplined merchants of pure sensation. Only in a master of colour do the two functions of colour coincide, so that structure and form are actually begotten of colour in its fullest saturation, and *vice-versa*.

Like Matisse and certain other Fauves, Matthew Smith is such a master. Had he consented to make Paris his headquarters instead of London, there is little doubt, in my mind at least, that the world beyond these shores would have been taught to value him at least as high as Vlaminck, and a good deal higher than Marquet or Friesz, for example. It is gratifying that the Tate Gallery should be honouring him at last, here in London, in a manner fitting his achievement. This retrospective exhibition is, of course, rather late in coming. Matthew Smith will be 74 this year[1] and it is conceivable that, had this or another selection of eighty-one of his paintings been massed thus for our pleasure and appraisal ten years ago, their impact would have been, not greater, but more relevant—at any rate to all his younger admirers. The fact is, Matthew Smith has steadily exerted an influence on British painting which has infiltrated rather than overwhelmed, producing its effect without ever being openly acclaimed or acknowledged. One has only to compare the use of colour, the plastic freedom and command of form

[1] 1953.

and design which so many of his younger colleagues now instinctively enjoy with the cramped, provincial, tepid, timid tidiness of all but a few among his own generation of British artists. If critical justice were always done, Matthew Smith would have enjoyed—in England—the prestige of a daring innovator twenty years ago.

This is not to overpraise him. I am not suggesting that he compares with Matisse himself. His idiom is altogether less daring, inventive or expressive than that of Matisse. Matthew Smith's problems have remained those of early Fauvism. Indeed, in certain respects he is even more 'old fashioned' than that—since he has never tired of that plastic modelling of forms which the flatter images of the mature Matisse 'superseded': Smith's image of jug, olive tree or opulent neck and bosom are nearly always modelled to the same degree of illusionistic rotundity as were the forms of Cézanne in about 1885, for instance. But the question of his up-to-dateness, either now or in 1920, is of secondary importance when we are in the position of being able to survey the greater part of the fruits of this painter's career. To-day at the Tate what we contemplate with so much reward is the personal statement of a remarkably mature, and a powerfully integrated artistic personality. With Matthew Smith the means of expression are as articulate and fluent as those of any British painter since Constable: and they are perfectly adjusted to his ends—which are not strange, or ambitious, or grandiose; but humble and, in the most exciting sense, materialistic—concerned to praise the actual and the everyday.

Therefore his dahlias are real; their voluptuous depths of almost blackish crimson are the smoky explosions that actually, at this very moment perhaps, are giving cottage gardens their one, yearly, hint of the tropical. His nudes are not dream-figures; but women of the softer, rounder kind, undressed. The element of surrealist disquiet is as utterly remote from this Fauve realist as are the structural preoccupations of the Cubists, or of their still more abstract brothers. Not that structure, as is occasionally asserted, is weak in Smith. He *draws* with colour, with a gigantic smudge or a sensuous weaving back and forth of the loaded brush—and we feel the density, weight and contour of his pears, his red Provençal hillsides, his model's thigh or belly. In fact, it is in this very breadth, in the controlled gusto of his calligraphic brush that Matthew Smith's failures materialize, when they do. The breadth is sometimes broad—but empty. The very voluminousness of the forms —so hard for most to achieve at all—sometimes decomposes into vacuous loopings of coloured lines.

The realism of Matthew Smith is that of the observer. Like Matisse, but unlike Picasso, Matthew Smith paints always (one can surely surmise?) from the subject direct. He does not invent either his objects themselves or the positions in which they appear in relation to one another. What arranging there is is done by the painter before he begins—stepping carefully about under the olives, finding the view, the angle of vision which composes the hillside there before him into a potential Matthew Smith. Or shoving apples, pears, jugs of roses about across the table top in the studio. These things being determined, what distortion there is consists only of a slight pulling about of profiles or big planes—jug profiles lurch and stretch beautifully into rhythmic accord with the wall or a curtain: table-tops tip up a bit. And the protruding bulges of rotund forms, whether breasts or peaches, are actually enhanced by a flattening, sideways-and-downwards sort of brushstroke, often extending from fat outline to fat outline. And from this it follows that his typical design is a fluid rather than a rigid scheme, composed of curves and arabesques rather than straight lines, right angles or rectilinear volumes. Nor is he successful when he occasionally tries out the latter sort. There are virtually no straight horizontals and verticals in his works. But that is a mark in his favour from the standpoint of the present moment. The rectilinear has triumphed universally of late. With a painting such as *Couleur de Rose*, 1924; or *Nude with a Pearl Necklace*, 1931; or *Still Life: Jugs and Coffee-Pot*, 1950; a baroque composer like Matthew Smith brings a needed relief to eyes surfeited on the geometric.

The Living Dead

Two hundred paintings from the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (at the Tate): and two hundred and twenty-one masterpieces from the Alte Pinakothek collection in Munich (at the National Gallery). I felt like D. H. Lawrence confronted by the Bible:

> Although I have 'forgotten' my Bible, I need only begin to read a chapter to realize that I 'know' it with an almost nauseating fixity. And I must confess, my first reaction is one of dislike, repulsion and even resentment.

Something not unlike this is what I felt on my first visits to the Munich and the Vienna pictures. For whereas modern paintings assail

me, demanding my instant attention, the great works of the past are passive: they *await* my interested scrutiny. In some sense I have to 'apply' myself to the 'study' of them: they will yield riches ultimately, of course; but these will only be had for the quarrying. I must first pierce the veil which their very 'greatness', 'pricelessness', or even plain dullness interpose. Why do masterpieces three hundred years old take on, at first glance, this quality of dullness? Admittedly, in nine cases out of ten, the dullness evaporates as we persist with the thing. After hurling oneself repeatedly at the repugnant yellows of an uncleaned Rembrandt (and to come to our own cleaned Rembrandts after the seven Munich ones is an experience in itself) something in our resistance gives way. Finally, we enter the picture on its own terms, as it were. But it has almost been a *painful* experience.

Perhaps what really has to happen is a flight back through time. For there is no doubt that to achieve that trance-like condition in which we really enter an old work, exploring it as if for the first time, it is necessary to become in some sense contemporary with its creator. We are not in touch with the reality of an old picture until it affects us with precisely the same force as a Picasso. When we are thus vitally moved by an Old Master, we find the thought and emotion conveyed are so urgent that the picture's familiarity, as a long-known object, has completely disappeared for the time being. For familiarity is the enemy, the obstacle which prevents reception: familiarity it is that obscures the perennial freshness and vitality in old and famous pictures, making them put on the tired face of a piece of common furniture.

But there is a further reason why great paintings of the past tend to become invisible; why, in other words, they only begin to exist again for eyes that are diligent in their study: it is that they represent experience which has become common property during the long interval since their creation. Rembrandt, Rubens, Titian—we have inherited the results of their labour in a double sense: we possess the material records of their spiritual exploration in the pictures themselves: but, also, we have been born with the knowledge of them and their vision dissolved in our blood, embedded in our bone. As D.-H. Kahnweiler has reminded us, a great painter is one who *alters* the world for us, for ever. For generations now, men have injected Rembrandt into every noble, dark-eyed, wrinkled face which may have looked out calmly from the dusky setting of a shadowy corner somewhere: indeed, they have read Rembrandt into those shadows themselves, until

shadows *are* Rembrandt. And any girl—with a fair complexion and a full figure, has been seen with eyes that were the gift of Rubens. It is for such reasons as these that the appreciation of the paintings of Old Masters is a special sort of exercise requiring that kind of effort which is needed for the re-learning of a thing we have already learnt once but forgotten. Nothing could be further removed from the *kind* of effort which a modern work demands of the spectator.

Tintoretto and Braque

For me the chief event—in both collections (from Vienna and Munich) was, it so happens, Tintoretto. *Mars and Venus surprised by Vulcan*, in the Munich exhibition, and *Susanna and the Elders* in the Vienna, provided me with the greatest excitement. It used to be said of Greco that he was 'modern': but now there often seems something strident about him; the sharp, simplified planes and the emphatic design seem a little too even in their emphasis and, above all, in their rhythm. We feel that Greco's structure is a too-insistent network of diamonds (like a Harlequin's suit): his vee-shaped forms have highlights like forked lightning and the rhythm they set up crackles monotonously up and down his canvases leaving no parts quiet, undisturbed. The Munich *Christ* is no exception to this, and turning from that to the Tintoretto *Mars and Venus*, which hangs near by, is like passing from a dramatic, didactic Picasso to a tranquil, water-dark Braque in which a deep thoughtfulness has slowly found its majestic expression. The rhythms in both Braque and Tintoretto are slow, precise, immaculate. The surface of this *Mars and Venus* is a consummate design from corner to corner. Every part perfectly performs the miraculous double function of defining an arrangement of solid forms in space while at the same time so chopping up and ordering the picture surface that one's eye moves ceaselessly to and fro among the miraculously lucid silhouettes of the figures, draperies and other objects.

The fact that I refer to the various forms in the composition as 'silhouettes', seems to me to show one more point of contact between Tintoretto and Braque; for both painters tend to reduce their images of solid forms to something which is essentially a flat area bounded by a continuous outline. None of the tonal modulations on the body of this Venus are so strong as to conflict with the superbly bounding line

that carves her figure out against the wall, the draperies and couch. (And the same is, if anything, more true of the figure of Susanna in *Susanna and the Elders* at the Vienna exhibition. Her immensely luminous body *floats* in the dark-green air of the garden). The rippling dark shape, which is Vulcan's left leg, is seen against the pale pink of a quilt, and is an even more obvious indication that Tintoretto's thought tended towards the flat silhouette. Indeed, this picture is made up of very carefully designed, flat areas, in sharply contrasted tone, set in opposition; so that one passes all the time from a light flat patch to a dark and then to one of intermediate tone, and back again. Modelling is not allowed to outweigh or overpower the linear definition of the forms: indeed, modelling seems to be assigned only to this or that part of the design on condition that it merely enriches shapes already marked out and defined by the rippling network of outlines. It is almost the equivalent of those slabs of richer, different textures (wood graining perhaps) with which Braque or Picasso elaborate a piece of their designs whose form has already been determined.

And then there are certain wonderful distortions. For instance, all the upright lines defining the windows and wall in the top left of the composition are tipped out of the perpendicular, to the right, and made to lean inwards towards the centre of the picture; while the doorpost in the top-right background leans also to the centre—that is, to the left, *against* the leaning windows. One window-frame behind Vulcan's shoulder is the sole vertical upright in the whole design; the only visible uprights of the various beds all lean to the left. The result of the conflict of all these leaning verticals is that space is created in the room and round the figures. Again, the dark marble lozenges of the floor show Tintoretto allowing his sense of pictorial space to get the better of his knowledge of the progressive diminutions of perspective. The second and third row of lozenges are tipped up slightly towards the spectator and are much larger than the nearest row. All these instinctive modifications show Tintoretto as a master of allover design in a sense that his contemporaries do not seem to have approached.

Realism in Titian

After Tintoretto, Titian is naturalistic, having less care for the flat design of his backgrounds and almost ignoring the corner areas of his

pictures. Indeed, Titian concentrated everything into his figures: their massive volume and the incredible subtlety of the means he employed for rendering that volume are what matter most with him. The relation of his figures, in the first place, to the rest of the composition and to the picture-frame; and, secondly, to each other (where more than one is involved) was never particularly exciting. There is often a dullness of design about the centrally placed figure in many of Titian's portraits. One feels that he gave little thought to the relation of a single figure (*Pope Paul III Farnese* in the Vienna show is an exception) to the four edges of the canvas. So long as his sitter's centre of gravity was situated securely in the middle of the lower part of the picture, he was content to forget the picture surface and devote himself to that miraculous illusionistic rendering of the voluminous form of his subject. His genius for elaborating a description, in terms of detailed texture, of his subjects without sacrificing, in the slightest degree, the massive broadness of their form was perhaps Titian's most remarkable gift. Tassels and velvet, eyes and lips, leap brilliantly into focus: yet the fantastic clarity of such detail in no way implies that the broad underlying structure of form was in any way simplified or summary; it was never the mere carrier of the final intricate detail. On the contrary, every hair, every glisten or gleam of flesh is but the foam that rides on the surface of the heaving water out of which it has 'grown', inevitably, organically in place. In Titian the detailed description of any form is but that form's most outward and final shape, as the skin is the outer limit and boundary of the flesh it covers. By comparison, Raphael's forms lack detail and descriptive force. Titian could heap his observation of the particular skin of a particular face on top of his rendering of its more generalized forms; whereas Raphael's *finish* remained generalized, and without the detailed texture of the particular. Thus Raphael's faces, arms and bosoms have a suggestion of burnished wood or metal about them: the final bestowing of the texture of human flesh and skin never takes place in Raphael's paintings. His interest in extracting the intricate yet massive rhythms of generalized form overrides his interest in a particular subject as such. We are thus tempted to say that Raphael falls between two stools. For if he was not concerned, in the final analysis, with the nature of his subject—with its *particular* character and personality, as Titian was—should he not have gone all out after something even more idealized, formal, architectural, abstract? Michelangelo pursued the purest course in this respect: the abstract element in Michelangelo was completely dominant: his passion was to demon-

strate the universal in the particular. The rhythms of his bodies are purified of any reference to particular people. There is none of Titian's evocation of real flesh and blood in Michelangelo: with him the human form is transmuted into pure abstract form, into what we must call an ideal, even, a divine form.

Leonardo—Scientist

Beside the Munich Raphael, *The Canigiani Holy Family*, hangs the Leonardo, *The Virgin and Child.* After the voluminous, rotund, machine-turned metal figures of the former, the Leonardo figures seem spindly, almost Gothic; and there is a Northern and Romantic fantasy about the little scene; especially the distant mountains, which suggest a German fairy-tale. Was ever a Latin genius nearer Northern Romanticism than here? Leonardo is not, of course, in the line of development which most interests a modern follower of Cézanne. His painting was, we cannot help feeling, in some vital sense impure. I mean that it seems to have been the result of a working out of certain practical matters: you feel he painted in order to extend—by demonstrating it to himself in paint—his knowledge of the nature of the physical world. But painting is its own justification and reward for the greatest painters. And in their works we always find all the separate parts coalescing. Leonardo's forms hold aloof from one another: each stands apart, lonely in its perfection: the constructed wholeness of each in some way excludes the others from formal communion. He lacked a disinterested attachment to the purely formal, having a still more detached passion at heart—the passion for scientific truth.

But all this . . . is only half the story. Scientific form precludes pictorial form: scientific space cancels out pictorial space, we know. Yet the inscrutable, mysterious, electric, blue-green *silence* of the *Madonna of the Rocks*! (at the National Gallery)—How explain it?

Abstraction in Rembrandt

At the Vienna exhibition Rembrandt's *The Large Self-Portrait* hanging near to *The Small Self-Portrait* (head), both marvellous and

both full-face, show how his judgement of the closeness of his eyes could vary without in the least changing the character of the face presented: the artist's left eye is half an inch nearer his nose than his right in the small self-portrait. It is just one more instance of the way pictorial statement may twist the physical laws of its subject-matter—indeed must twist them. However, to me the great mystery of Rembrandt is this: why, in the apparent absence of any devices of surface design, do these dark canvases satisfy every aesthetic appetite so completely? And I imagine the answer must be that Rembrandt's feeling is of such depth, intensity and complexity that it bestows upon his centrally placed forms a sort of explosive vitality. So that although the broad framework of a head conforms to the physical reality, it is nevertheless charged, in the course of painting, with a thousand formal suggestions, a thousand crystalline abstract facets, a thousand thrusts and counter-thrusts. I think because these are so varied and so powerful the final complex form—the finished head—needs the surrounding cushion of darkness to absorb, as it were, the rays of its abstract power. Frequently I am aware of these abstract bars, wedges, little heavy squares of Rembrandt's abstraction, built up in thick paint over thin, like a de Staël or a van Velde to-day, *before* I make any contact at all with the person in the portrait. Rembrandt's abstract configurations can overpower the personality of even *his* subjects.

Luminosity and Voluminosity in Drawings

Surrounded by drawings from the Albertina collection, I am tempted to ask: How can an eye long trained by study of Cézanne be lured (along with the bulk of spectators, it seems) by the writhing, intellectually exploratory lines of Dürer, when the calm and glowing volume of the child's head in Rubens's *Son Nicholas* beckons from the end wall? How be drawn to investigate the maze of contours by which the German master describes with literal accuracy the wrinkled flesh in *Head of an Old Man* before first enjoying the potent scribble by which Rembrandt's *Elephant*, for instance, is presented? Rubens and Rembrandt on one hand, and the Italians at the other, between them show all the main pictorial virtues on which the European tradition rests. Forms that are in themselves voluminous are *organized in space* with such profound art that we are barely conscious of it—so free,

spacious, natural and 'empty' are these drawings after the obvious ingenuity of arrangement in the crowded Dürers. Furthermore, these masters' forms are evoked by a drawing which effaces itself almost completely; we are aware of the forms *before* we notice the lines and other markings by which they are suggested. But with Dürer the opposite is true: it is the lines themselves we are first aware of in his works, and which we therefore enjoy first as an intricate flat pattern, as a mesh of filigree metalwork, almost. To see through this mesh, to see the form of rock, tree or face which it describes, rather than evokes —this is a further act, that is almost dissociated from the first. The forms in a Dürer drawing do not *assail* us (like those of Rubens or Michelangelo, which seem to bulge out of the paper), they have no immediacy; they are as much imprisoned as released by the drawing, which keeps them in its cage, half visible behind its iron tracery.

To my mind the immense superiority of Rubens, Rembrandt and a host of Italians lies in the fact that we cannot separate the flat design of the lines, dashes, spots and smudges from the harmony of the forms these marks evoke. Their harmony is conceived in terms of solid bodies in space. But there is no conflict between the drawing (which exists on the surface of the paper and so must fulfil the requirements of the surface, which are those of design) and the volume or solidity of the things it depicts. Thus in Rembrandt's *Landscape with a Bridge over a Canal* a lightish amber smudge partly encircled by a sepia scribble of the pen are not merely harmonious marks in which there is embodied, if we choose to see it, a willow tree: for us, from the first, these marks *are* that tree. We cannot regard the smudge in forgetfulness of the tree: and we cannot see the tree and be oblivious of the line and the smudge. In Rembrandt there is a perfect marriage between the form of receding rutty track, or of voluminous sunlit tree, and a blob or smudge or scribble. And it is worth noting that 'precision' is not the monopoly of a fine point tracing a line as thin as cobweb—the smudge of a thumb may be every bit as precise, as charged with meaning and definition.

Paris

In Paris, towards the end of June, an Englishman reflects that he is farther from the sea than at any point in Britain. The white dust lines your lips; the air is drier, thinner, almost, and more transparent than

at home; a leafy plant behind balcony bars (Braque), somewhere on the face of the house opposite, seems so near, clear and sharply defined that you feel you could put out a hand and touch it. The slight opacity which its humidity presumably bestows on English air is missing; light comes down evenly on all the surfaces of all the houses in Paris; and it comes from a great height, for the sky there in June is immensely high, streaked only by a few strands of taut, thin vapours (Derain). Corners of dingy yards, or peeling paint at the bottom of a canyon in the Quartier Latin have a glow, their surfaces saturated by the calm, pervading light, many times reflected: the dirtiest, dullest surface is luminous (Chardin: Utrillo).

Physically, and by reason of its climate, this city is perfectly equipped for its rôle as the capital of Europe's visual arts. But there are other reasons for its power to attract Europe's painters. Chief of these is that so many artists have practised their art here that the place itself is a potent stimulus and inspiration. To sit in a Paris café is to be at once in touch with the raw material of half a century of masterpieces.

The Power of Paris

Next year, like last, there will be some in London who will once more indulge in the insular luxury of asking themselves: Is French painting finished? This question could only be asked from a position of comparative ignorance of all that has actually been happening in Paris since 1945. A better acquaintance with the subject must lead one to a very different question: Where is French painting going? And the answer to that is: In all directions—simultaneously. This is possible only because of the vast extent, scale and scope of that feverish artistic activity we attempt to trap within the single phrase: the School of Paris.

I believe that it is still true that French painting is the best in the world: it still holds the centre of the stage. Indeed, it *is* the stage. There are still a great number of intensely professional painters of many nations living and working in Paris. And from the ranks of these there may spring at any moment an individual artist of genius who will be capable of giving that extra twist to the material that is now the common property of possibly a hundred very intelligent artists—who are still only intelligent, and not geniuses. The point is that a new

vision, and new significances, are a little more likely to find their way into the consciousness of a painter if that painter lives in a climate which is not only sympathetic to but actually stimulates that vision. Paris is a perfect incubator in which there are still a great many eggs. London is a windy back-garden where the few hens who are capable of laying an egg at all have to search out a hole under the nettles. So far from modern art in Britain being what its enemies like to call it—'a profitable racket imposed by the dealers'—the truth is quite different. I should say that not more than half a dozen of the painters in this country whose work I admire are able to live on the proceeds of their painting unsupplemented by other means. And these would be the best known.

As a matter of fact, the economic position of Parisian painters in all but the top categories of success is no better. On the other hand, once he makes his name in Paris a painter makes it, simultaneously, everywhere else—in New York, London and so on. Paris, I am convinced, is as potent a breeding-ground as ever it was. The battle of styles is as fierce, urgent, ruthless (in its elimination of the second-rate) as ever. The painters are *obsessed* by painting. The recognition of the emergence of a new problem, or a new aspect of an old problem, is an experience immediately shared not by half a dozen painters (as in London) but by fifty artists all possessed of a pure professionalism which utterly precludes anything so rudimentary as faulty technique. In this setting, too, no one wastes time repeating what others have done better: complete knowledge of the present and the near past eliminates wasted effort. Energy is also saved by the existence of a vocabulary of terms which painters, critics and dealers all understand—even if it does not cater for personal refinements of meaning. What a boon such terminological agreement would be here in London!

Three Schools in Post-War Paris

In Paris the first post-war reputations were made by a group (a 'group' stylistically speaking: I do not think there were any formal ties) of five painters: Pignon, Estève, Tal Coat, Tailleux and Gischia. All were represented in the exhibition, 'Young Painters of L'Ecole de Paris', which the Arts Council arranged in London in 1952. But their close affinity had now dissolved. In 1945 their contribution consisted

of little more than an exceedingly painterly reshuffling of ingredients taken straight from Matisse, Picasso, Bonnard or Cézanne. By 1952 only Pignon (who can, as I recently discovered in Paris, be much finer and stronger than he was at this show—and I'm not referring to his occasional obedient sallies into 'social-realism'), Gischia (never to my taste) and Tailleux still pursued that Cubist-Fauve mode of figurative painting. They were, like their style, the oldest present. (Tal Coat's picture, incidentally, was *not* in his recent more abstract manner.) But almost simultaneously, after the war, two non-figurative abstract movements also came to the fore—a 'hard' variety and a 'soft'. The former took their cue not from Mondrian or northern Constructivism but from the Italian Parisian, Magnelli. Here this group (known in Paris as the Denise René group—after their common gallery) was represented by Dewasne, Deyrolle and Pillet. They somewhat extend the pre-war modes of pure abstraction, which of course were characterized by hard, clean, neat surfaces and mainly geometrical forms. This whole development interests me infinitely less, fine as it is, than the second non-figurative development—the 'soft' one. In this latter movement are to be found the most important innovators of the present time. But this 'soft' abstract group is not really one group but a number of groups and individuals having in common one thing: they are all non-figurative, *and*—their surfaces are as painterly, as rich and diverse in colour, texture and handling as those of the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. Thus, for convenience, we must list together such richly various talents as Estève (now abstract: he was very badly represented here), de Staël, Singier, Soulages (whose picture was, I believe, the finest in this whole exhibition), Hartung, Le Moal and also five painters who were unaccountably absent: Manessier, Bazaine, Schneider and the two brothers van Velde. But these are all established. There are already younger artists, roughly associated, who are extremely promising—Quentin and Richetin: or, even more impressive, Rezvani and Arnal, whose canvases here were superb. (And one noted that it is Bonnard alone of the 'old masters' who now influences the best of the youngest painters—as he does Estève.)

This host of good painters—many of whom I have no space to mention—will be justified in history if they have acted only as the indispensable professional environment of three or four new artists of genius. I believe these truly exceptional figures are there. Estève and Soulages are two names I will hazard. De Staël is very fine too, but possibly his superlative sense of pictorial architecture is lacking in

some way: he yields no *image*, such as we get from Soulages's equally brilliant structure. In Estève, however (and possibly in the younger Rezvani), the great post-war struggle between the exclusively structural 'hard' Denise René school and the more atmospheric, spatial, sensuous and organic abstraction of the 'soft' painters such as Singier is at last being resolved in a synthesis that combines the best of both worlds. Estève's pictures synthetize the 'hard' and the 'soft', the organic and the geometric. Furthermore, they evoke a three-dimensional reality which is at once both an 'inner' and an 'outer' landscape. They demonstrate, like those of Soulages, that there is no such thing as non-figuration. The best abstraction breathes reality; it is redolent of forms in space, of sunlight and air.

The Philosophy of Herbert Read

Sir Herbert Read is our most paradoxical aesthete: for him science is poetic and poetry scientific. He is also the most important writer on art in English now living. 'If you wish to reduce surrealism to its foundations you will find the only basic elements on which any useful structure can be built—the basic elements of natural science and psychology,' he writes in *Surrealism and the Romantic Principle*, one of the fourteen essays, written over a period of fifteen years, reprinted in his book, *The Philosophy of Modern Art* (Faber, 1952). Such a materialistic basis is equally the 'reality' into terms of which Herbert Read has always sought to translate the fantastically varied and conflicting artistic phenomena comprised by the modern movement. He searches for art's scientific credentials: his critical vocabulary is derived to an extraordinary degree from the natural sciences, psychoanalysis having, perhaps, contributed as much as all the others put together. Even if one feels—as I do myself—that the interpretation of art in scientific terms is likely to be more interesting to the scientists than the artists; even if one believes, that is, that art provides its own proper vocabulary of appreciation—being a self-reliant activity—nevertheless, one recognizes that Herbert Read's achievement in thus giving art its passport into a world dominated by science is of immense importance. There is probably no branch of the visual arts in England to-day but has had its life renewed, its status enhanced, as the more or less direct result of Sir Herbert's tireless and quite extraordinarily intelligent advocacy during the past twenty-five years.

It is, perhaps, as a philosopher rather than a critic that he has made this tremendous impact on our thought and practice; and this, in his present Preface, he explicitly admits. The title of this book is apposite, for 'what, if not philosophic, is this activity I have indulged in . . . for the best part of a lifetime?' And he reflects that it is neither critical nor historical.

'The method I adopt may be called philosophic because it is the affirmation of a value-judgement. To be precise: I believe that among the agents or instruments of human evolution, art is supremely important. I believe that the aesthetic faculty has been the means of man first acquiring, and then refining, consciousness.'

Or, again from the Preface, 'Aesthetic activity is biological in its nature and functions; and human evolution in particular, and by exception, is differentiated from animal evolution by the possession of this faculty.'

Could more tremendous claims be made for art? Herbert Read's whole philosophy is seen in microcosm in the above sentences: here, if it can be created, is a structure which, like Sartre's existentialism, is supremely ambitious, aiming to provide a total, all-embracing, self-sufficient system which will integrate all known opposites; science and religion, art and philosophy, thought and feeling, reason and intuition. I am not competent to say whether Sir Herbert has succeeded in erecting this edifice, except, possibly, where it impinges on art and art criticism. One might be excused, however, for wondering whether, in an age of technical brilliance in an expanding multiplicity of separate, specialized departments of knowledge, one man's passionate conviction can succeed in making a new synthesis that will challenge, to some extent, physicists, biologists, physiologists, psychologists, sociologists, art historians, critics, poets and artists (to name only a selection of the experts involved), each on his own ground. Only a writer with the passion, integrity and intellectual energy of a poet would set himself such a task. And only a man of great intellectual daring, encyclopaedic knowledge, acute sensibility and aesthetic awareness, exceptional ratiocinative powers, and deep moral seriousness could hope to succeed. I believe that Herbert Read possesses these qualities: if *anyone* can create a new philosophy of art on these lines, which will hold the respect of that host of intellectual technicians who form, for better or worse, the least unenlightened section of our public, that person is Sir Herbert Read.

Although it is essential to recognize that everything Sir Herbert

writes—whether on Wordsworth, anarchism or Naum Gabo—is pressed into the service of this gigantic constructive effort, the only way to treat any single aspect of it is for the relevant 'expert' to consider Read's treatment of that aspect purely on its own merits. When he is writing about Gauguin, Picasso, Klee, Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson, Moore, or Pevsner and Gabo (there are separate essays on all these artists in the book I've named), how does what Sir Herbert says impress someone who is spending his life in the study or practice of painting? The answer is probably, in most cases, very slightly paradoxical: I have myself felt that Herbert Read shows, at one and the same instant—often in the same sentence or paragraph—an undeniable insight into a given painting or sculpture *and* an equally undeniable aloofness from it. At different times, therefore, I have held opposite views as to Sir Herbert's true capacity for response, confronted by a visual work of art. I have felt, on the one hand, that his main passion was not for the picture itself so much as for the meaning of the picture; not for the specific work of art, but for the fascinating system of thought it gives rise to in himself. He hardly ever comments, for example, on the actual physical qualities of a painting—or rather, he does not dwell on these qualities. Comment—yes; but his commentary moves rapidly away from the particular, concrete example into interpretation—in a word, it moves almost immediately into the realm of aesthetics, philosophy or even sociology.

But no sooner is one fully conscious of this fact than the pendulum of one's judgement begins to swing away in the opposite direction. For how, one reflects, can the 'fascinating system of thought', to which Sir Herbert's consideration of a painter's work leads him, *be* fascinating if it is in fact divorced from a real contact with that work, or is devoid of insight? Only once or twice in the 268 pages of this book have I felt that Sir Herbert was imperfectly aware of the work under discussion. The truth is, Herbert Read's digressions into theoretical interpretation are not really discursive at all since they are in fact based all along (even when they do not declare it: reticence is the essence of this most audacious writer) on first-hand perception. What is probably true, however, is that he consciously refrains from that 'communication of sensuous pleasure' which he once wrote was Roger Fry's 'real art'. Certainly Fry's great achievement was the elevation to full consciousness of the actual optical experience of works of painting or sculpture. Herbert Read is Fry's greatest successor. This he would never have become if he had been content to emulate Fry in respects in which Fry

was supreme. Besides, the times moved on. Since Fry was writing, the multiplicity of movements, crossing and recrossing in one another's paths, has rendered a more strenuous attempt at classification, comparison and interpretation a prime necessity for contemporary criticism. This, precisely, is what Herbert Read has concentrated upon. He alone has squarely confronted the inchoate movements and revealed an order in seeming chaos. In *The Modern Epoch in Art*—the most interesting essay in this very important book—he remarks: 'It is the *co*-existence of the image and the symbol, as norms of art, which explains the apparent complexity and disunity of the modern movement.' Cézanne, the last of the 'scientific' painters, whose relation to their external surroundings was the objective one typical of science, was the final master of 'the image'. Gauguin and Van Gogh, in reintroducing 'the symbol', register the beginnings of that landslide into subjectivity (or poetry) in which Western art has ever since been engulfed. . . . Such is but a fraction of the potent argument in which he here opposes image and symbol. Space forbids me to argue that every image, once it is made concrete in art, rapidly becomes a symbol.

Mexico

'"Only the ugly is aesthetic now," said the young Mexican artist. Personally, he seems as gentle and self-effacing as the nicest of lambs. Yet his caricatures are hideous, hideous without mirth or whimsicality. Blood-hideous. Grim, earnest hideousness. Like the Aztec things, the Aztec carvings. They all twist and bite. That's all they do. Twist and writhe and bite, or crouch in lumps. And coiled rattlesnakes, many, like dark heaps of excrement.'

Thus spake D. H. Lawrence, in 1923. Lawrence, the poet, brilliantly aware of form in nature, did not care to linger over it in art; but, instead, chased the essence lying beyond the form. An art critic cannot quite do this. He has an almost scientific interest in the means of sculpture or painting. Poetic flair for divining essential meaning must often, even if he possesses it, be reined in, in the interests of descriptive truth. So I turned from Lawrence to Fry and found this:

'But here in Mexico, where every phase of life seems imbued with religious sadism, we find indeed that while the content of the art, the subjects depicted, are often of revolting cruelty—there is, for

example, a relief in the British Museum which represents a priest pulling a cord into which aloe thorns have been knotted through his tongue—we find that the plastic idiom, the quality of the curves, the choice of proportion and so forth, arouse in us feelings of an almost contrary kind . . . a feeling of serenity and calm. . . .'

And this, precisely, is the point: indeed it is *always* the point. The palpable forms, the actual rhythms, the precise manipulations of space —these are the prime realities, the determining factors, the definite features which cause an art to be great or trivial. Even the horror of a stone bowl made for containing twitching human hearts, fresh-torn from sacrificial victims, is in a curious way neutralized if the thing is 'beautiful': that is, if it transmits a vital rhythm. Vitality in art is as impersonal an element as truth in philosophy or correct measurement in science. Mere human suffering cannot deflect it.

This stone bowl was one item among 1243 at the mammoth exhibition of the art of Mexico which came to the Tate Gallery in 1953. Mexico itself, all of it, you felt, must be here. From the archaic earthenware and terracotta figures and pottery (1500 to 100 B.C.) up through the various arts (the pottery, jewellery, painted books, but above all the sculpture) of the varied Pre-Columbian cultures—Olmec, Teotihuacan, Zapotec, Maya, Toltec and Aztec, for instance—through the watered-down (or gingered-up) versions of European art of the Colonial period, to the unprecedentedly ferocious political expressionism of contemporary Mexican painting, this hypnotic display uncoiled. Architecture was probably the sole absentee from this exhaustive—and exhausting—presentation of Mexican visual art. There was even a section, not included in those 1243 exhibits, of contemporary, but traditional, Popular Art. And it was the only light-hearted, gay relief we got, with its cheeky featherwork; its gaudy but brilliant lacquer work and pottery; its huge paper *Judas* figures, painted with the skeleton (an impudent rather than a macabre device), whose veins are fuses branching out to fireworks placed at the joints; its skulls of solid sugar; its figures of plaited palm; and its brilliant, luminous toy fruits made, I imagine, from pith, carved and stained. We relaxed and smiled. Yet even here, amid the festival flutter of paper clothes and leather masks, Death and the Skull grin through. There is darkness in the light.

If we left out of account most of the Colonial exhibits (Holman Huntish landscapes: extremely diluted Chardin still lifes from the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries) the undeniable spiritual unity

of Mexican art at once became apparent. I say 'most' of those exhibits because even among the baroque gilt wood archangels there was a rhythm foreign to European baroque. The logic and curvilinear sweep of European baroque begins to break down. In the huge, glittering, gilt retable from the 'Ex-convento de Tepotzotlan', the flat, restless repetitiveness of Pre-Columbian architectural ornament is already beginning to seethe—gold maggots under the curves. Nevertheless, it is in the contemporary painting that the spirit (but the *spirit* as distinct from the *form*) of ancient Mexico reasserts itself so strikingly—and horrifically. Executions, dismemberings, torture and anguish recur as the subject-matter of a high proportion of the modern paintings—as they did in the impressive engravings of José G. Posada, who died in 1913; a sort of Mexican Daumier. Incidentally, far too many living painters were represented; with the result that in one room at least the general level, and the confusion, really were equivalent to little more than an art school sketch-club. Rivera, Siqueiros, Orozco and Tamayo, the admitted leaders of modern Mexican painting, would still make their violent impression unsurrounded by the bad and the mediocre.

But the unity I have mentioned is not aesthetic. It is spiritual. The violence, the sadism and the sense of hopeless, unredeemable fear in the face of Death—ever present, not only in the dark, like a ghost, but in the brightest daylight this planet can provide for its inhabitants—these are the perennial content of Mexican art. An Aztec stone sculpture is a noontide ghost, a midday hallucination. The dark meets the light with dramatic violence in Toltec, Maya or Aztec art, literally as well as metaphorically. Designed to be read under the more or less vertical rays of a burning sun, the transitions of plane in Aztec sculpture are abrupt and violent: indeed, the commonest relationship between planes is an angle either of forty-five or ninety degrees. Such transitions create ledges—chin, nose, brows—casting deep shadows under a strong sun. The sculptural image of the Aztecs was not, therefore, an affair of subtly modelled surfaces merging imperceptibly into one another: it was an arrangement of startling oppositions of black and white—of sunlit stone barred and striped and interrupted by a pattern of black shadows. And this effect was reproduced in the magically darkened Tate, by vertical spotlighting so that many a lurid visage appeared already encaged . . . by the bars of its own shadows. *Coatlicue*, goddess of Death and Earth, gained from such dramatic, down-filtering jungle light. But the wonderful subtlety of *The Adolescent* was lost.

Form in Aztec sculpture is box-like, a counter-point of rectangular volumes. And this rectilinear crank-shaft rhythm—it is, of course, the principal underlying formal theme in Henry Moore, who derived it from Mexico—permeates the art of all these Pre-Columbian cultures, not only in the pattern of decorative relief in sculpture but in the actual direction of the three-dimensional forms themselves. A rather obvious illustration is in the hands and arms of the *Coatlicue* already mentioned. Her arms hang vertically, and close to her sides, from shoulder to elbow; her fore-arms are held out straight in front of her and are horizontal, forming right angles with the upper arms at the elbows. Then, hands raised, making a second right angle at the wrists, she exposes her palms, which therefore make a vertical plane. But her fingers she shoots forwards at us, producing a third right angle. Mostly, however, the crank-shaft movement is less explicit than this. It is the profound, unifying formal principle sustaining and lending power to what would otherwise often be no more than an inchoate mass of writhing, savage detail.

This very powerful, insistent, rectilinear pulse is at its hardest and sharpest in the Aztec carvings. The near abstract *Head of a Macaw*, with its three pierced tunnels for eyes and mouth, is remarkably near to modern art both in form (a Moore abstract) and feeling (the double-eyed, hallucinatory profiles of Picasso). But this square rhythm softens in the preceding cultures—the *Macaw* is actually Toltec, nearest of any to Aztec in quality—and it is of course totally absent from the contemporary paintings. That is why I limit the unity of Mexican art to the spiritual. How strange it is that, in an age when the rhythms of Aztec or Teotihuacan sculpture pulse so loud for us here in Europe, coinciding as they do with the superb formal qualities of Cubism, the modern Mexican is virtually oblivious of them. True, Rivera was once a Cubist: true, Tamayo is an exception. But it is the morbid savageness of ancient Mexico, not its impeccable formalism, that the moderns, Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros and others, recapitulate in crude political terms. Orozco's hacked bodies, huge in scale, violent in paint, destroy the picture surface completely: they are sculptural, not pictorial, forms—an elementary expressionist fault. Tamayo alone is still a good painter. And *his* formal gravity and control come from Paris direct. For the rest one repeats: 'Only the ugly is aesthetic now.'

Turner Resurgent

Roger Fry preferred Constable to Turner, because his vision was direct, observant, simple where Turner's was a complex of intangibilities, subtle in form and, in its general organization, very much contrived. Turner, said Fry, knew all the tricks of the trade; was an arch-composer who could 'make a picture' out of anything, being a man of incredible skill and knowledge—the knowledge of appearances was for him what a wide vocabulary is for a writer. The exact and most typical contour or silhouette of alp, mountain torrent, breaking sea-wave or cathedral arch was something Turner could conjure up on paper or canvas at will and, what is more, could then assemble in terms of panoramic grandeur. And all this, more or less, from memory—which is what Fry found suspect; because he venerated that candour of observation which, in its very bite upon visual reality, so often militates against compositional grandeur, a grandeur subjective in its origins and not easily reconciled with the sensory veracity which checks everything against the visual data.

Turner, however, early on in his career came to terms with the visual data of the world, mastering it with that apparent lack of effort which, again, Fry found a sin; since it was unlike Cézanne, perhaps. Having acquainted himself with all the laws and the mysteries of natural appearances, Turner ranged over half Europe in order to supply himself with an ever-increasing repertoire of natural forms to play with—both of landscape, architecture, rocks, trees and skies. Then, with these firmly in his possession, he was at last free to sit back and weave those fantastic compositions, gigantic in their implied scale, heroic in their architectonic organization, in which the properties of landscape are thrown together with the same easeful purpose with which one reorganizes the furniture of a room. But the subject of these pictures is always light. The density of opalescent air is even more important than the objects that that air envelops. An abstract harmony of lights and shadows, of opaque or transparent surfaces, seems to have been Turner's aim; and in this he was certainly one of the most revolutionary painters that has ever lived. Indeed, in his preoccupation with light, and its concomitant space, he was exploring the special ground of painters who would be alive a century after his own death.

The Dort (1818), one of Turner's masterpieces, is at first glance, and

viewed from too close, an airless Dutch landscape in which the sort of finish and detail bestowed on hull and rigging is so precise and minute as to suggest forms of altogether the wrong scale: the forms of still life. It is not until one steps back that the miraculously luminous tonal quality invades the umbers and greys of water, sail and sky; thus bestowing a sense of outdoor space that is utterly masterly in its grasp. The achievement of such breadth *through* a precise and highly informative detail is one of the forgotten glories of painting. Delacroix is perhaps the last exponent of this: breadth in his successors has been achieved in place of detail and not in addition to it.

It was because he had travelled this way, digesting detail instead of by-passing it, that the exceptional breadth, even the abstraction, of the later Turner is so potent. Fry was, of course, quite right in drawing attention to Turner's 'picture-making'. This, precisely, is what he did. He was not interested in that form of pictorial empiricism which tests itself against 'experience in front of Nature'. He was concerned to project a subjective dream; a dream-image constructed out of light and air and those visual appearances which he cared to employ. No wonder that his rhythms are somewhat repetitive: that his compositions return again and again to an ovoid construction—an 'artificial' device which tends to leave the corners of the canvas empty. And so on. What is to-day surprising is that Fry should have applied this criterion of observation, or empiricism. Nothing is clearer to us than that Turner, like every important living painter to-day, was a subjective artist, weaving fantasies, not only out of the stuff of luminous air but around the chosen symbols of his art: a pale disc glittering at the bottom of a tunnel of cobalt dots—the moon: a ladder of yellow bars—the sun's light on the sea. And it was Fry's own Cézanne who, in recent times, decisively rejected an empiricism of the visual sense and sent modern art burrowing into subjectivity. Even if you hold, as I do, that a subjective content is best conveyed by artists who, like Turner or Cézanne, have mastered an empirical observation of appearances, it is still strange that Fry should not have been able to concede to Turner his special subjectivity.

Space in French Landscape

Form in sculpture is actual, tangible. But form in painting is more an imaginative than a physical reality and it is evoked rather than

defined; moreover, there are numerous species of it—indeed every considerable painter creates a new version both of form and of space.

At an exhibition held at the Royal Academy in 1950, entitled 'Landscape in French Art, 1550-1900', it was possible to follow the development of the pictorial concept of space round some of the spirals of its history. Cézanne and Seurat are, as it were, on different floors of a building that Poussin also once inhabited: and once Renoir's house was tenanted, perhaps, by Delacroix and even Claude. Yet there is never repetition. Imitators do not repeat, for the experience of their models is not there, to be re-experienced; so, from a remote standpoint, they simulate, copy, distort and occasionally discover a small seam unexhausted. Repetition occurs, however, in the critic's vocabulary, as he moves through the ages; the word 'space' is pressed into service a hundred times, and always to serve a different end. What are valid senses of the word at one point on the walls of this exhibition become inaccurate the next, for the purpose and meaning of the spatial element changes. Our vocabulary should move with it. To begin with the very broadest distinctions, we might say that pictorial art has discovered three kinds of spatial significance. First there is the largely undefined (but nonetheless real) space which is evoked by any graphic sign that can be dignified by the term *image*. The Altamira animals are often said to be flat: yet even an animal silhouette must, once we have recognized it, inhabit an imagined space, somewhere in front of us; and the scale of such an animal image will go far to determine precisely at what distance from the observer the imagined bison is felt to be standing. An image, however, need not necessarily be figurative, representational, in order to create the sense of a specific spatial context for itself: a Miró design, which may be abstract, has a precise spatial setting.

The second broad category of space in painting centres round the discovery of mathematical perspective. Both before this discovery (at its most worked-out) and after it, when it had ceased to matter—had ceased to be the focus of conscious effort—the reproduction of appearances depended upon evoking, more or less, the spatial relationships of the physical world as these are now understood by scientists—or should I say, engineers? With the exception of Cézanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin the entire contents of this exhibition came within this second category: those three painters must be joined to the contemporary masters of 'modern art' as creators of a third type of space—

the space which is locked up in a modern image. This differs from the Altamira kind in that the findings of centuries of naturalistic discovery have informed it at every stage. Whether Cubist or Fauve or Constructivist in origin, modern painting is conceptual to a degree that was hitherto unknown. By comparison with all predecessors Cézanne's *Le Château Noir* is a compressed shorthand for evoking natural space: and what has followed since has intensified that compression to the point, in many cases, of abandoning all possible reference to the coherent spatial sequences of reality. In other words, modern art has (and with remarkable naturalness) substituted the metaphysical for the physical in the realm of subject matter.

It might be natural to confuse for a moment the non-scientific space in, say, *River Deities*, by Niccolo Dell'Abbate, with one or another of the contemporary modes: and there were other pictures in the same room as this where the distortion of mathematical perspective gives a faint echo of modern practices. But there is really no parallel here: movement is in opposite directions. Dell'Abbate was working up towards the Poussin he never knew, but whose mathematical perfection he would have owned was a crowning achievement.

If there is reason to align Poussin with Cézanne or Seurat—as many do now—the essential differences are of course immense. Poussin, desiring to leave no segment of the landscape only vaguely defined, dotted the undulating hillocks of the middle-distance with buildings emphatically geometric and sharp in design (at Burlington House one might see the marvellous *Orpheus and Eurydice* from the Louvre; or the Earl of Plymouth's equally fine *The Body of Phocion Carried Out of Athens*). This meant a firm foothold at frequent intervals for perspectival drawing: the less geometric rotundities of earth and trees were less amenable to such perspective—being less susceptible of mathematical translation. Poussin's processes of construction drew more from a knowledge of biological and geological structure than from the optical sensations of the painter himself, one feels—so tightly dovetailed are the segments of form; so airless the resulting canvases, despite their great structural depth. Cézanne, of course, drew for his structural certainty and his incredibly incisive design upon sensation itself. No knowledge of the laws of physical structure was as important to Cézanne, as an inexplicable but overwhelmingly insistent optical experience: we might call it the experience of optical emotion. While he achieved a static architecture every bit as impressive as Poussin's, Cézanne gained immeasurably by virtue of his immediateness of vision,

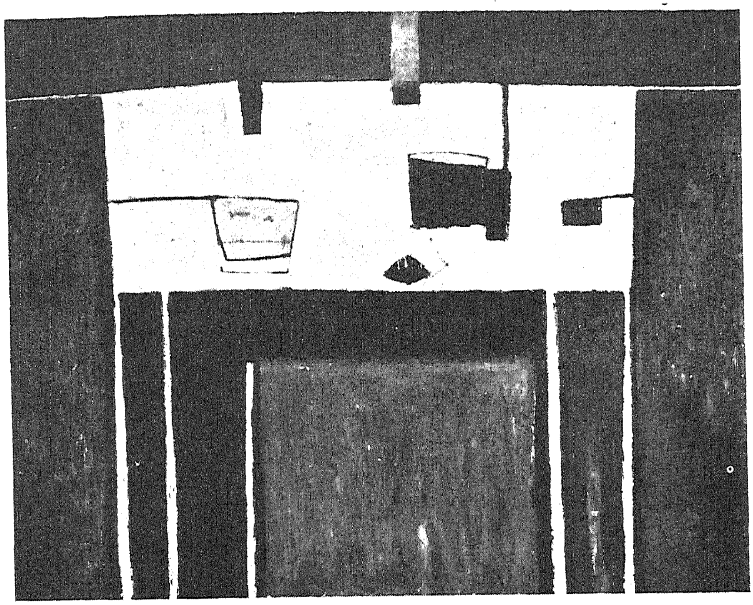
which confers movement—the 'movement', or thrust, of one form against (one might even say 'into') the next.

Space in Poussin, then, might be regarded as the sum total, the logical result, of an extremely ingenious arrangement of 'thought out' forms, each one dovetailing into the next with remarkable precision. There is that in his landscapes which demands the same sort of awe-some admiration one feels when confronted by some stupendous feat of mechanical engineering. Poussin's mind was focused upon these forms (of city, tree or mountain) rather than upon anything so in-definable as a direct sensation of space itself, such as we find in Claude. Claude's mountain or sea horizons are infinitely farther off, the sky is higher and the atmosphere more breathable than anything in Poussin's stuffy, well-constructed countries. By comparison, Claude's drawing was weak (follow the waterline in almost any of his bays and creeks; it soon goes either uphill or down). But space in his pictures was not a by-product of mathematics: it was a conscious goal; a quality sought and found. Undoubtedly such words as *lyrical* or *poetic* are often used to indicate this loose, open, carefree quality in Claude—as opposed to Poussin. But this is unjust, because the poetic has no such limitations. The mathematical, static, silent, vacuum-surrounded forms of a Poussin landscape have their own poetry—and it is a poetry of great intellectual grandeur: Ruskin's 'the abstract glory of colour and form' does something to define it.

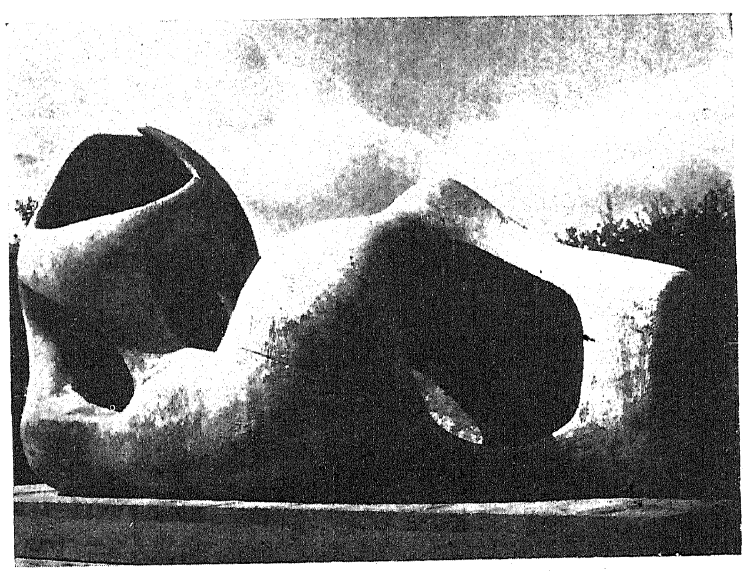
With the eighteenth century we came to an end of spatial exploration for the time being. Watteau as well as his followers had none of the passion for the abstract glories: they were masters of the particular. Curiously enough, Boucher it was who stood out (in this exhibition) as the chief exponent of form in his time—though Fragonard's *The Mound*, with its steamy, light-and-shadow-laden air, was the best picture among a pretty intolerable roomful. Van der Meulen and Hubert Robert were unutterably weak and formula-ridden: and the lucid Vernet was little more than lucid. It was not until Corot that the fantastic formulae, the eighteenth-century phantasmagoria of cob-webbed, stage-property elms, began to dissolve in the light of day. And even then not quite, for Corot's small open-air studies—such as *The Palace of the Popes at Avignon*—were accompanied by those reversions to formula and sentiment, the large, more consciously constructed pictures like *The Four Times of Day*. But, at his marvel-lously candid best, space for Corot was the space of dry, sunlit air, brown land receding into grey, then cobalt, to a firm, far, clear horizon.

The space was in the colour, as indeed was the form: Corot was a most tentative draughtsman; his touches defined the form as much by virtue of their colour and tone as by their shape.

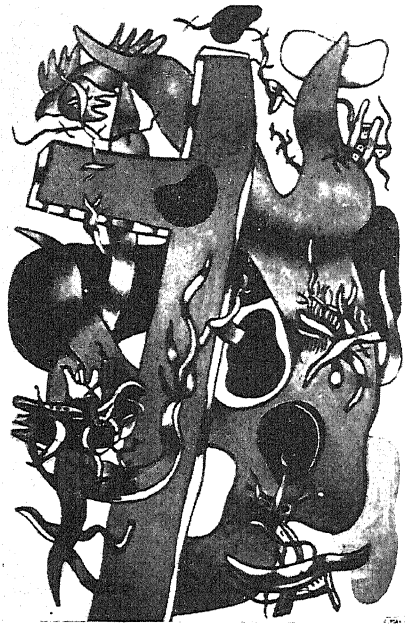
There is not room here to enlarge upon the changes that came about in the consciousness of space with the Impressionists. After Courbet had hardened, deepened, widened and made something less sweet of the naturalistic space of Corot (though a *Seascape* showed Courbet's veracity of observation at its sweetest) the Impressionists backed increasingly away from those distant, truthful horizons; backed out almost to the picture surface itself. Of this surface they were most conscious, like Cézanne. Space was air, was luminosity, even. Depth was now conveyed in terms of the surface to an extent hitherto unprecedented. Coming to almost any Impressionist after any of the earlier painters one finds one can no longer swoop into the picture's subject, unconscious of passing any barrier at the picture surface. Yet, though consciousness of this surface is often remarked in Cézanne, few have observed that it is almost equally strong in Monet, Sisley, Pissarro and Renoir. With our contemporaries, however, the picture surface is become the paramount pictorial reality. Any subject-matter we may choose (if we are not already non-figurative) must come to terms with the demands of that surface.



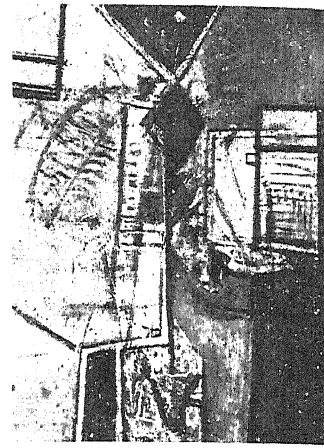
36 William Scott: Table Still Life, 1951-52



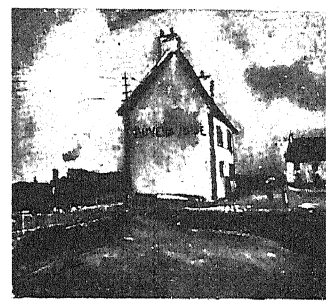
37 Henry Moore: Reclining Figure.
(Internal and External Forms), 1953. (Plaster, 7 ft. long.)



38 Fernand Léger: The Forest, 1942



39 Alan Davie: Painting, May, 1953



40 Maurice de Vlaminck: La Gare d'Auvers-sur-Oise, 1920

41 Maurice de Vlaminck: La Route de l'Aigle, 1944

NOTES

As I have explained in the *Introduction*, this book consists of a rearrangement of material which I originally published as separate essays and articles. I give below the details of the composition of each of the present essays. P. H.

1. THE NECESSITY OF DISTORTION IN PAINTING

Lecture at Leeds University, October 1949.

2. HILLS AND FACES

Composite: *The Penwith Society (St. Ives) Broadsheet* 2, June 1951; Articles on Ivon Hitchens in the *New Statesman and Nation* on November 20, 1948; March 19, 1949; June 14, 1952; and in *Art News and Review* for November 18, 1950; Articles on Peter Lanyon in *New Statesman and Nation* for October 15, 1949, and in *St. Ives Times* for June 22, 1951; two penultimate paragraphs on Lanyon hitherto unpublished; final paragraphs from *Art News and Review*, March 6, 1954.

3. SPACE IN CONTEMPORARY PAINTING AND ARCHITECTURE

Composite: Article (under the same title) in *The Architects' Year Book V* (Elek; London), written in January 1953; and Catalogue Introduction to an exhibition entitled 'Space in Colour', held at the Hanover Gallery, London, in July 1953.

4. SUBMERGED RHYTHM

Composite: Articles on Bernard Leach in the *New English Weekly*, June 27, 1946, and the *New Statesman and Nation*, February 2, 1952; and a lecture, 'Pottery and Painting', given at Dartington Hall in July 1952, to the *International Conference of Craftsmen in Pottery and Textiles*.

5. CUBISM, CONSTRUCTIVISM AND THE ARCHITECT—REFLECTIONS IN JANUARY 1948

Composite: Article in *The Architects' Year Book III* (written January 1948); and talk given at an I.C.A. symposium at the R.I.B.A., autumn 1949.

6. BRAQUE

Composite: Article in the *New English Weekly*, July 4, 1946; B.B.C. Third Programme talk ('The Changing Jug'), January 1951; Article in the *New Statesman and Nation*, June 27, 1953; Catalogue Introduction to Braque exhibition at Gimpel Fils, June 1953.

7. PICASSO

Composite: Articles in the *New English Weekly*, January 10, 1946; and *New Statesman and Nation*, October 20, 1951; B.B.C. Third Programme talk, April 10, 1947; Article in *Magazine of Art* (New York), March 1949; B.B.C. Third Programme talk ('The Changing Jug'), January 1951; Articles in *New Statesman and Nation* for October 9, 1948, June 11, 1949, and May 16, 1953; Article in *Art News and Review*, December 2, 1950.

8. PIERRE BONNARD AND ABSTRACTION

Composite: Long article, hitherto unpublished, written in February 1947, just after Bonnard's death; Article in *World Review*, June 1947; and Article in *New Statesman and Nation*, November 24, 1951.

9. VLAMINCK

Introductory essay in *Vlaminck* (publishers: Lindsay Drummond), 1947.

10. FOUR NOTES

Klee. Article in *New English Weekly*, February 21, 1946.
Matisse. Enlarged from part of B.B.C. Third Programme talk ('The Changing Jug'), January 1951.
Soutine. From a B.B.C. Third Programme talk, May 1947.
Léger. Article in *New Statesman and Nation*, February 25, 1950.

11. MODERN ENGLISH ROMANTICS—SUTHERLAND, VAUGHAN AND WYNTER

Sutherland. Composite: From Articles in *L'Age Nouveau* (Paris), *New Statesman and Nation*, August 14, 1948, June 12, 1948, June 6, 1953; B.B.C. European Service talk, 1946; B.B.C. Third Programme talk, April 28, 1950.
Vaughan. Talk delivered at I.C.A., October 24, 1951.
Wynter. Hitherto unpublished. Written in October, 1954.

12. PAUL NASH

Composite: Articles in *New English Weekly*, February 13, 1947, and March 6, 1947; and in *New Statesman and Nation*, March 27, 1948.

13. FIVE TYPES OF A STRACTION

Nicholson. Composite: Article for British Council, January 1952; Articles in *New English Weekly*, October 18, 1945; B.B.C. Third Programme talk, May 1947; Article in *New Statesman and Nation*, May 17, 1952.
Pasmore. Composite: Articles in *New English Weekly*, February 7, 1946, *New Statesman and Nation*, December 6, 1947, and November 12, 1949, *Art News and Review*, December 30, 1950.

Scott. Article in *New Statesman and Nation*, June 20, 1953.
Hilton. Composite: First paragraph from *New Statesman and Nation*, June 24, 1952; remainder hitherto unpublished. Written in October, 1954.
Wells. Hitherto unpublished. Written in October 1954.

14. SCULPTURE: FRUIT OR THORN?

Composite: Articles in *L'Age Nouveau* (Paris) (written January 1949), *House and Garden*, March 1951, *New Statesman and Nation*, January 7, 1950, *New English Weekly*, October 31, 1946; Barbara Hepworth Retrospective Exhibition Catalogue Introduction, Wakefield City Art Gallery, April 1951; Articles in *New Statesman and Nation*, February 18, 1950, *House and Garden*, June 1951, *New Statesman and Nation*, January 24, 1953; B.B.C. Third Programme talk, April 28, 1950.

15. TWENTY-FIVE FRAGMENTS

Cézanne's Watercolours: *New English Weekly*, February 21, 1946.
Rome; April 1953: *New Statesman and Nation*, May 16, 1953.
Rouault's *Guerre* and *Miserère* Aquatints: *New Statesman and Nation*, January 24, 1948.
Artists in Cornwall: *New Statesman and Nation*, January 17, 1948.
To an American Painter: *Magazine of Art* (New York), March 1949.
Frances Hodgkins: *New Statesman and Nation*, March 26, 1949.
Alan Davie: Written in October 1952: previously unpublished.
James Cant in London: Catalogue Introduction, February 1953.
Massimo Campigli: *New Statesman and Nation*, June 11, 1949.
A Paradox of Criticism: *New Statesman and Nation*, August 13, 1949.
Apropos of Sickert, Keene and Cézanne; B.B.C. Third Programme talk, June 12, 1947.
Matthew Smith—English Fauve (1947 and 1953): *New Statesman and Nation*, November 8, 1947, and September 19, 1953.
The Living Dead: *New Statesman and Nation*, May 28, 1949.
Tintoretto and Braque: Composite: *New Statesman and Nation*, May 28, 1949, and June 4, 1949.
Realism in Titian: *New Statesman and Nation*, May 28, 1949.
Leonardo—Scientist: *New Statesman and Nation*, May 28, 1949.
Abstraction in Rembrandt: *New Statesman and Nation*, June 4, 1949.
Luminosity and Voluminosity in Drawing: *New Statesman and Nation*, May 15, 1948.
Paris: *New Statesman and Nation*, July 16, 1949.
The Power of Paris: Composite: *New Statesman and Nation*, July 19, 1952; and B.B.C. Third Programme talk, April 28, 1950.
Three Schools in Post-war Paris: *New Statesman and Nation*, July 19, 1952.

The Philosophy of Herbert Read: *New Statesman and Nation*, March 29, 1952.
Mexico: *New Statesman and Nation*, March 14, 1953.
Turner Resurgent: *New Statesman and Nation*, February 21, 1953.
Space in French Landscape: *New Statesman and Nation*, February 4, 1950.

INDEX

Note: Entries in bold type indicate the specially important references; 'mentioned' indicates that the reference is to a passing allusion only.

Adams, Robert, 225
Afro, 35, 171, 239
Albertina Collection, 263
Altamira paintings, 277
Alte Pinakothek (Munich), 257 ff.
Antibes, 101-2, 109-10
Armitage, Kenneth, 225
Arnal, François, 116, 267
Arp, Jean, 197, 204, 218
Arts Council, 266
Avebury, 178

Bacon, Francis, 168
Barns-Graham, W., 241
Battersea Park, 215
Bazaine, Jean, 41, 267
Bell, Clive, 106, 198
Blake, William, 72, 73, 129, 155
Bonington, Richard Parkes, 158
Bonnard, Pierre, 19, 23, 32, **116 ff.**, 157, 166, 252; *The Bowl of Milk*, 123-5; *L'Eté*, 128; landscapes, 126; mentioned, 41, 72, 113, 156, 158, 192, 198, 253, 267
Boucher, François, 279
Brancusi, Constantin, 208
Braque, Georges, 14-15, 17-20, 23, 58-9, 74-5, **81 ff.**, 104-5, 134, 142, 172, 183, 184, **259**; *The Duet*, 17-18; *Still Life with a Vase of Flowers*, 18-19; *The Washstand*, 58; *Feuilles, Couleurs, Lumière*, 83; *Kitchen Table*, 84; *La Femme à sa Toilette*, 84; *Intérieur: 1942*, 86-7; *The Billiard Table*, 85; *The Studio*, 93-4; quoted, xiv, 233; mentioned, viii, 32, 48, 64, 71, 78, 113, 116, 130, 156, 164, 171, 173, 185, 190, 195, 196, 209, 215, 265
Breughel, Pieter, the elder, 72, 73, 131
Brittany, 14
Buffet, Bernard, 171-2, 198
Burlington House, 94
Burra, Edward, 180
Butler, Reg, 43-4, 225, **226-32**; mentioned, 64, 224

Calder, Alexander, 221-5
Campigli, Massimo, 247, 248-9
Canaletto (Antonio Canale), 178
Cant, James, 247-8
Carbis Bay, 69
Cardew, Michael, 56, 59
Carn Galva, 39
Cézanne, Paul, 14, 72, 92, 97-9, 120, 133, 138, 147, 177, 183, 192, 193, 215, **237-8**, 252, 271, 276, 278; *Woman with Guitar*, 215; *Le Château Noir*, 278; quoted, 91; mentioned, 4, 30, 31, 45, 48, 85, 119, 136, 145, 156, 163, 170, 181, 188, 198, 205, 206, 212, 250, 254, 256, 277, 280
Chadwick, Lynn, 225
Chardin, Jean-Baptiste, 102, 192, 265
Clark, Sir Kenneth, 68
Clarke, Geoffrey, 225
Claude (Lorrain), 277, 279
Constable, John, 4, **11**, 91, 155, 275; *Dedham Vale*, 11-13; mentioned, 30, 72, 129, 158, 178, 250

Constant, 201
Constructivism, Constructivists, 9, 19, 41, 46, 47, 68 ff., 92, 184, 186-7, 204
Le Corbusier, 67, 78
Cornwall, 35-7, 173, 241-2
Corot, J. B. C., 91, 279-80; *Palace of the Popes at Avignon*, 279; *The Four Times of Day*, 279
Corunna, 100
Côte d'Azur, 126, 164
Courbet, Gustave, 280; *Seascape*, 280
Crome, John, 158
Cubism, Cubists, 7-8, 14, 21, 28, 68 ff., 91-3, 101 ff., 135, 139, 145, 148-9, 163, 170, 183, 185, 190-1; Analytical, 15, 92, 103, 171; mentioned, 4, 5, 41, 46, 74-5, 170, 173, 197, 202, 209

Dali, Salvador, 71, 181
Dartington Hall, 213, 214
Daumier, Honoré, 136
Davie, Alan, 46, 48, 246
Degas, H. G. Edgar, 100, 192, 193, 194
Delacroix, Eugène, 45, 276, 277
Delaunay, Robert, 197
Dell' Abbate, Niccolo, 278
Derain, André, 134, 135, 137, 139, 140, 177; mentioned, 130, 247, 265
Dewasne, Jean, 267
Deyrolle, Jean, 267
Dieppe, 172
Dürer, Albrecht, 72, 263-4; *Head of an Old Man*, 263
Dymchurch, 178

Eliot, T. S., 106, 249
Ensor, James, 72
Estève, Maurice, 28, 41, 116, 266, 267-8

Fantin Latour, Théodore, 100
Fauves, Fauvism, 28, 130 ff., 163, 254-6; mentioned, 93, 202
Fragonard, Jean-Honoré, 279; *The Mound*, 279
Friesz, Othon, 255
Frost, Terry, 28, 46, 48
Fry, Roger, ix, 127, 175, 188, 253, 270-2, 275-6
Fuseli, Henry, 155
Futurism, 185

Gabo, Naum, 43-5, 69-70; mentioned, 35, 36, 46, 184, 197, 204, 213, 215, 270
Gainsborough, Thomas, 158, 178
Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna (Rome), 112
Gauguin, Paul, 72, 270, 271, 277
Giacometti, Alberto, 227
Gilbert, Stephen, 201
Gill, Eric, 240
Gilot, Françoise, 108
Gimpel Fils' Gallery (London), 146
Giotto, 72, 248
Girtin, Thomas, 158
Gischia, Léon, 266, 267
Gonzales, Julio, 226, 231
Goya, Francisco de, 156
Greco, El (Domenico Theotocopouli), 120, 159; *Christ*, 259
Grimaldi, Musée (Antibes), 110
Gris, Juan, 70-1, 181; *Guitar and Bottle*, 70; mentioned, 78, 130, 158, 165, 173, 185, 195
Grünewald, Mathias, 165
Guerrier, Raymond, 171-2

Hamada, Shoji, 59, 63-4
Hammersmith, 194
Hanover Gallery (London), 48, 128, 198
Hartung, Hans, 35, 41, 267
Hélion, Jean, 45, 197

Hepworth, Barbara, 212, 213, 215-221; *Cosdon Head*, 217, 220; *Biolith*, 217, 221; *Contrapuntal Forms*, 217; *Mother and Child*, 218; *Pierced Hemisphere*, 218; *Conoid, Sphere and Hollow*, 218; *Oval Sculpture*, 218, 219; *Helicoids in Sphere*, 218; *Convolute*, 218; *The Wave*, 219; *Rhythmic Form*, 220; *Eocene*, 220; mentioned, 36, 204, 224, 229, 242
Hertfordshire, 10
Hilton, Roger, 46, 47-8, 200-3
Hitchens, Ivon, 28 ff., 48-9, 139 n., 164, 171; *Figure in the Open*, 33; *Nudes*, 33-4; *Summer Nude*, 34
Hodgkins, Frances, 244-6
Hogarth, William, 158
Hunt, W. Holman, 181

Impressionism, Inpressionists, 6, 250, 251, 280
Institute of Contemporary Arts, 100, 101, 227-8

Johnstone, William, 48-9

Kafka, Franz, 229
Kahnweiler, Daniel-Henry, 68-9, 148, 258
Kandinsky, Wassily, 45, 163, 164, 184
Keene, Charles, 250-1
Klee, Paul, 141-4, 165, 247; mentioned, 5, 72, 129, 163, 164, 204, 270
Kunsthistorisches Museum (Vienna), 257 ff.

Lanyon, Peter, 26, 35 ff., 46, 49, 139 n., 173; *West Penwith*, 36; mentioned, 27, 28, 48, 207, 241, 242
Laurens, Henri, 210, 211
Lawrence, D. H., 21, 127, 257, 271
Leach, Bernard, 52 ff.
Lefevre Gallery (London), 189, 223
Léger, Fernand, 148-51, 185; *Corsican Village: Sunset*, 149; *Fourteenth of July*, 149; *Still Life with Open Book*, 149; *Woman in Blue*, 149; *The Card Players*, 150; *Mother and Child*, 150; *The Dance*, 150; *The Forest*, 151
Lelant, 25
Le Moal, Jean, 267
Leonardo da Vinci, 36, 129, 197, 262; *Virgin and Child*, 262; *Madonna of the Rocks*, 262
Lewis, Wyndham, 23, 28, 163, 178, 185
Lipchitz, Jacques, 210
London Gallery, 103

McWilliam, F. E., 225, 229
Maeght, Galerie (Paris), 82
Magnelli, Alberto, 197, 267
Maillol, Aristide, 209
Maison de la Pensée Française (Paris), 108
Malaga, 99
Manchester City Art Gallery, 214
Manessier, Alfred, 41, 116, 151, 267
Marini, Marino, 64
Marquet, Albert, 130, 255
Mathieu, Georges, 151
Matisse, Henri, 23, 96, 114, 130, 137, 139, 144-6, 170, 228; mentioned, 5, 19, 34, 71, 113, 116, 156, 166, 185, 229, 232-4, 255, 256, 257
Memling, Hans, 72
Mexico, 209, 271-4
Michelangelo, 45, 72, 237, 261-2, 264
Miró, Joan, 45, 163, 204, 223, 277
Modigliani, Amedeo, 146, 147, 148
Mondrian, Piet, 46, 47, 119; mentioned, 5, 41, 45, 184, 185, 187, 197, 199, 213

Monet, Claude, 121-2, 250, 251, 280
Montagne Sainte-Victoire, 212
Moore, Henry, 30, 57, 64, 208 ff., 217, 219, 220, 224-5, 234; quoted, 128; Time and Life building, 209; *Mother and Child*, 214; *Madonna and Child*, 214, 215; *Reclining Figure*, 215; *Three Standing Figures*, 215; *Family Group*, 215; *Standing Figure*, 227; mentioned, xiii, 32, 72, 216, 270, 274
Morris, William, 53, 54
Morvah, 39, 173
Mousehole, 241
Mumford, Lewis, 42
Murray, W. Staite, 54, 57, 59

Nash, Paul, 175 ff., 270
National Gallery (London), 141
New Burlington Galleries, 228
Newlyn, 241
Nicholson, Ben, 31, 45, 69, **185-91**, 196, 197, 203; *Carafe*, 69; mentioned, xi, 28, 32, 36, 184, 185-91, 204, 213, 241, 242, 270
Normandy, 126

Obelisco, Galleria del (Rome), 239
Orozco, José Clemente, 273, 274

Palmer, Samuel, 155, 162, 170
Paolozzi, Eduardo, 225, 229
Paris, 29, 264 ff.
Pasmore, Victor, 46, 48, 50, **191-7**; *Children Playing on the Banks of a River*, 194; *Spiral Motif*, 197; *The Snowstorm*, 197
Pembrokeshire, 160-2
Penwith, West, 38-9, 207, 241
Pevsner, Antoine, 184, 270
Picasso, Pablo, 5, 22-3, 71-5, 81-2, 85, 88-91, 94, 96 ff., 116-17, 120, 135, 142, 156, 169, 173, 184, 187, 226, 230, 240; quoted, 238; *Head of a Man*, 14-15; *Still Life with a Black Head*, 15-16; *Gertrude Stein*, 22; *Going to School*, 100; *Waiting Her Turn*, 100; *Tavern in Barcelona*, 100; *Minotaur*, 101-2; *Bull*, 101-2; *Femme au Chignon*, 103; *Portrait of M. Uhde*, 103; illustrations for Buffon, 105; Doves and pigeons, 106-7; *Dove of Peace*, 106-7; kitchen interiors, 107; *Les Demoiselles des Bords de la Seine*, 109; *Dances and Games*, 110; *Skull and Sea-urchins*, 111; Ceramics, 111-12; *War* and *Peace*, 112-15; *Guernica*, 112, 113, 114, 156, 169, 176; *Femme assise*, 149; *Buste*, 149; *Winter Landscape*, 172; mentioned, xiii, 4, 26, 32, 48, 55, 61, 78, 129, 165, 166, 168, 183, 185, 195, 196, 198, 209, 210, 213, 215, 231, 250, 257, 259, 270
Piero della Francesca, 14, 45, 93
Pignon, Edouard, 266, 267
Pillet, Edgard, 267
Pissarro, Camille, 250, 251, 280
Poliakoff, Serge, 41, 198, 201
Pollock, Jackson, xi, xiii-iv, 222, 246
Posada, José G., 273
Pound, Ezra, 178
Poussin, Nicolas, 72, 83, 139, 277, **278-9**; *Orpheus and Eurydice*, 278; *The Body of Phocion Carried Out of Athens*, 278
Pre-Raphaelites, 162

Quentin, Bernard, 267

Raphael, 102, 261; *Canigiani Holy Family*, 262
Read, Sir Herbert, ix, 76, 141, 186, **268-71**
Redfern Gallery, 195

Rembrandt, xi, 45, 72, 237, 258, 263-264; self-portraits, 263; *Elephant*, 263; *Landscape with a Bridge over a Canal*, 264
René (Denise) group, 267
Renoir, Auguste, 122, 193; mentioned, 31, 34, 66, 215, 238, 254, 277, 280
Rezvani, Serge, 116, 267-8
Richetin, René, 267
Rie, Lucie, 55
Rivera, Diego, 273, 274
Robert, Hubert, 279
Rodin, Auguste, 208, 232
Rome, 238-9
Rouault, Georges, 23, 239-40
Rousseau, *le Douanier*, 242
Royal Academy, 277
Rubens, 30, 45, 120, 258, 259, 263, 264; *Son Nicholas*, 263
Ruskin, John, 54, 279
Russell Square (London), 178
Rye, 178

St Ives (Cornwall), 25, 35, 54, 55, 173, 191, 241, 242
St Just, 39, 173
St Pancras Hotel (London), 178
Santomaso, Giuseppe, 35, 171
Sartre, Jean-Paul, 269
Schneider, Gérard, 41, 267
'School of Paris' Exhibition, 94
Scott, William, 46, 47, 48, **197-200**; *Harbour*, 199; *Interior*, 200; *Table Still Life*, 120
Segonzac, André Dunoyer de, 134, 139
Seurat, Georges, 83, 194, 277
Sickert, Walter Richard, 5, 99, 158, 192, 193, 241, **250-3**, 254
Silbury Hill, 178
Singier, Gustave, 41, 116, 267, 268
Siqueiros, David Alfaro, 273, 274
Sisley, Alfred, 250, 251, 280
Smith, Matthew, 23, **253-7**; mentioned, 28, 31, 72, 163, 180
Soulages, Pierre, 28, 41, 46, 198, 267-8
Soutine, Chaim, 121, 133, 146-8
de Staël, Nicolas, 28, 41, 46, 198, 263, 267
Steer, Philip Wilson, 250
Stein, Gertrude, 96
Stokes, Adrian, 36
Surrealists, Surrealism, 19, 71, 268
Sussex, 29, 31
Sutherland, Graham, 31, 32, 159, **160 ff.**, 168-70, 244-5; *Somerset Maugham*, 23; *Lord Beaverbrook*, 23; *Sun Setting between Hills*, 167; *Small Boulder*, 167; mentioned, 5, 28, 72, 129, 193
Swaledale, 210

Tailleux, Francis, 266, 267
Tal Coat, Pierre, 266, 267
Tamayo, Rufino, 273, 274
Tate Gallery, 83, 167, 168, 228, 234, 255, 257, 272
Tauber-Arp, Sophie, 45
Thames, the, 194
Tintoretto, 26, 102, **259-60**; *Mars and Venus Surprised by Vulcan*, 259; *Susanna and the Elders*, 259, 260
Titian, 45, 258, **260-2**; *Pope Paul III Farnese*, 261
Tonks, Henry, 250
Tooth, Arthur, and Son, 253
Toulouse-Lautrec, Henry de, 86, 100
Tower, James, 55
Trendrine, 39
Trevalgan, 39
Turnbull, William, 225
Turner, J. M. W., 13-14, **159-60**, **275-6**; *The Needles*, 159; *The Dort*, 275-6; mentioned, 15, 72, 158, 178, 193, 241, 246

Utrillo, Maurice, 133, 134, 265

Vallauris, 108-9, 112, 172
Van de Meulen, 279
Van der Rohe, Mies, 42-3
Van Gogh, Vincent, 4, 136, 170, 271, 277
Van Velde, Geer and Brahm, 41, 263, 267
Varengeville, 172
Vaughan, Keith, 48-9, 168-71
Velasquez, 12, 45, 119
Venice, Biennale (1952), 225
Vermeer, Jan, xi, 12
Victoria and Albert Museum (London), 142
Vlaminck, Maurice de, 130 ff., 172, 255; *La Gare d'Auvers-sur-Oise*, 132; *La Route de l'Aigle*, 132, 137-138, 140; *Blés Coupés*, 133-4
Vorticism, 28, 164, 185
Vuillard, Edouard, 125

Wadsworth, Edward, 178
Wakefield City Art Gallery, 218
Wallis, Alfred, 36, 242
Ward, James, 162
Watteau, Antoine, 279
Wells, John, 28, 206-7, 241; *City Dawn*, 206
Whistler, J. A. McNeill, 176, 192, 241
Wilson, Richard, 158
Wood, Christopher, 36, 241 ; *Church at Tréboul*, 14
Wright, Frank Lloyd, 42, 43
Wynter, Bryan, 171-4, 241

Zadkine, Ossip, 210, 211
Zennor, 39, 173, 188, 242
Zwemmer Gallery (London), 103

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Known for his art criticism in *Arts* magazine and the *New Statesman and Nation,* Patrick Heron here presents a commentary on contemporary art that is distinguished by its quality of clear analysis of the specific pictures under discussion. THE CHANGING FORMS OF ART could have been written only by one who is himself both an outstanding painter and a critic with great literary gifts.

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